These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 3

The Trail of Ryner and Gang and The

Standing Between The Countries

Gastark Empire

The country that has expanded quickly in the northern continent. It's name reaches far across the continent, even all the way to Roland in the south.

Refal Edia

Hero King of Gastark. Possess the Hero's Relic, Glovil. Holds a one-sided love for Kiefer.

Refal: I shall also conquer the southern continent!

Imperial Nelpha

Currently being attacked by Roland Empire. Got into a pinch thanks to the idiot heir prince. Ryner, who's moving to save the remaining royal blood, Toale, is fighting Claugh from Roland's forces.

Claugh Klom

Bearing the nickname, "Death God", the Field Marshal of Roland's forces. Supreme commander for the forces attacking Nelpha. Sion's close friend, also in truth soft-hearted.

Claugh: Ryner is such a pushover

VS

Ryner Lute

Bearing a special kind of eyes known as **Alpha Stigma**, and able to manipulate powerful magic. Fundamentally, a lethargic, languid guy..... supposedly but because of recent circumstances, he's becoming pumped up!

Ferris Eris

Partner of Ryner. Ultra beauty, skilled in the sword, and a

believer in the Dango god. Has a delicate relationship with Kiefer.....?

Kiefer Knolles

Roaming through various countries as a spy, but undertook Refal's request and returned to Ryner's side. Loves Ryner.

Roland Empire

A country that, with Sion's revolution, arose out of the corrupted reign of the rotten nobles. Initially, it had a policy geared towards peace, but recently, it started invading its neighbours.

Sion Astal

Hero King who was from a mistress of the previous king. Loved as a king by the people. Unable to choose the means to build a country where everyone can smile. Is bounded by a strangely fateful relationship with Ryner, it seems.

Sion: In order to minimize the sacrifices.

Interlude – Him and her and

That day.

That night.

'Why did it come down to this?'

You said while crying, but I couldn't answer, since I was crying as well.

'Really, why did it come down to this?'

You said with a shaking voice and cried while clinging to my chest, but I didn't know, so I couldn't answer.

You love me.

And I love you. Really, everything should've been fine with that.

Why did it come down to this?

Why is the darkness expanding like this?

I looked around me.

But as expected, all I saw was darkness, and I gave up.

The two of us gave up.

And we knew.

We knew that we couldn't turn back time no matter how much we cried.

The light wouldn't return.

But still.

"…"

You said.

You raised your face.

You raised your tear-stained face, and said to me.

"…if we're born again."

"Hmm."

"Make sure you kill me."

"Hmm."

"If not, then everything will come down to this again."

"Hmm."

"I mean…this is just too painful."

"Hmm."

“You have to kill me, you know?”

“Hmm.”

“……liar. You’ll refuse to kill me again.”

“Hmm.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Then make sure you kill me.”

“…”

I couldn’t respond to that, and she cried again.

“I won’t kill you because I love you.”

“Idiot.”

“Hmm.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“That’s right.”

I said, and I embraced her body.

But she’d already lost her body.

No, my body is beginning to disappear as well.

Everything is covered in darkness.

The entire world is being covered in nothingness.

And she, using what little time she had left, said again.

“Promise me.”

“…”

“Say that you’ll kill me.”

“…”

“Please.”

“…”

“Hey, promise me. Make sure you kill…”

“…”

And her words stopped.

She disappeared with a sad expression.

In the end, I couldn’t respond to her words.

'Promise me.'

'Promise that you’ll kill me.'

She said.

But that’s impossible.

It’s impossible for me to kill someone I love.

That’s why I can only curse god.

Why did he make it this way?

Why did he make everything this way?

I’ll kill you, I thought.

If you existed.

If something like god existed, then I'll definitely kill you – I cursed.

But those damning words of mine never reached god.

No, they didn't reach anyone.

Because they were erased right away.

Because they disappeared right away.

And I'll disappear as well.

I'll disappear along with her.

Come now, the world is collapsing.

And the next one will begin.

Will I be able to choose properly in the next one?

Will I be able to choose to kill her?

It's still impossible, I… I…

But everything disappeared right then.

And the next one began.

Chapter 1 - Towards North-Northeast

Die!!

If just saying that one word will cause someone to die, then no matter how many lives one has, it will never be enough.

That's why, at the instant when,

"..... die!!"

Was shouted at Ryner Lute,

"Hn ah~?"

He groaned while scowling.

With messy black hair, and lazy black eyes,

However, his habitually sluggish, tall, lean, slouched figure, was entirely tensed up.

The reason was because, right now,

"..... oiy oiy spare me that would you ~"

He was attacked by a monster.

And with his lazy eyes, he looked at the monster in front of him.

"....."

Looking at the red haired "muscled brain" who shouted ‘die’ at him.

Currently, the person before Ryner was a man who had fiery red hair, and sharp gleaming eyes.

Ryner knew his name.

Field Marshal Claugh Klom.

The monster sent by Roland Empire’s Hero King, Sion Astal, to destroy Imperial Nelpha.

Claugh Klom.

The death god of the battlefield --- Claugh Klom.

That name was notoriously famous.

A man who once appears on a battlefield, will paint the ground red as the blood falls like rain and cause his enemies to scream in fear.

Everyone is afraid of his name.

Everyone will shake in fear at this name.

That was the name of Claugh Klom, one who can completely change the scenery of a battlefield.

And Ryner, in response to that,

“.....”

How idiotic can this be.

He made a comeback at himself with his inner voice.

No matter how strong Claugh is, how can just the appearance

of one man turn the tide of a battle? It can't be as simple as that, he thought.

That's why he made light of that, thinking that eighty percent of the rumors were exaggerations, and came here as a result.

With Ryner alone, he thought he could render one, two or three Claughs helpless and capture them.

On top of that, Ryner already had a grasp of Claugh's strength, for he had sparred lightly with him once before.

At that time, Claugh's movements were really terrific. He was strong and fast. Furthermore, contrary to him being a muscle brain, he was quick-witted and deployed his magic at a high speed.

If you don't consider him as a monster, then who can you call a monster?

That was how strong Ryner, a former member of the covert ops group called **The Greatest Magician of Roland**, thought of and ascertained Claugh.

But, but still.

"....."

Ryner thought he could win.

I'm probably a little stronger than Claugh Klom, he thought.

That's why he came here.

In order to capture Claugh, he came to the campsite erected by Roland army who came to invade Imperial Nelpha.

And then he attacked Claugh.

He attacked the Claugh who was standing carelessly on top of the hill a small distance away from the campsite.

And Ryner would easily defeat and capture Claugh Klom with an overwhelming strength.....

“.....”

That should have been the case however.

Claugh pulled out a knife.

As he did so, with an incredible speed and accuracy, he aimed at the center of Ryner’s chest.

“Woah.”

Ryner groaned. If he tried to dodge, he wouldn’t make it.

Thus he knocked it away with his hand.

But, at that moment, Claugh was already moving. A move for killing Ryner.

Every bit of his movement was very much faster than the moves that they had exchanged previously.

On seeing that.

“.....”

Shit, I was tricked, Ryner scowled.

The sparring that happened previously was in preparation for this instant.

A year ago.

Meaninglessly, Claugh had come to spar with Ryner. He came

to attack Ryner, whom he disliked.

After having fought for about two, three rounds, and deploying their magic then --- Ryner had thought.

Claugh was indeed strong, but nothing like what the rumors had said, Ryner had thought.

But that was what he was made to think.

With a fed-up face, he glared at Claugh.

“What a swindler.”

On hearing that, Claugh grinned.

“You are the one to blame for being deceived.”

On hearing that, *That’s quite right*, Ryner thought.

In a battlefield, the one who’s deceived and killed has only himself to blame.

That was the first thing that Ryner had learned when he was undergoing battle training at the Germer Kleisrole Training Institute.

Every battle starts with deception and ends with deception.

"Now, how will you deceive me in order to stay alive?"

That was Germer Kleisrole had said.

"Now, how will you deceive the world in order to stay alive?"

That was what Ryner’s master had said.

While remembering those words,

“..... seems like I’ll be the one deceived and killed, Germer.”

He muttered softly.

Claugh said,

“Die.”

His right hand moved in his direction.

That arm was covered in a pitch-black color.

Pitch-black scribblings and patterns crawled around the surface of his arm.

So what in the world was that? Just by looking, Ryner understood.

A **forbidden curse**. An abnormally unthinkable sinister forbidden curse was implanted into that arm.

However, that was not a matter that could be considered sane.

This was just knowledge Ryner knew about; in experiments where the **forbidden curse** was placed into human bodies, ten thousand out of ten thousand people experimented on died --- it was the kind of experiment in which the odds of success were insanely low.

But yet, this fella had it implanted into his arm.

Despite the strength he possessed, in order to seek a new power, he further went on to implant the curse into his arm.

And Ryner understood what in the world the curse might be.

He closed and opened his eyes again.

With vermillion pentacles floating above his black pupils, he saw through the entirety of the curse attached to Claugh's arm.

On that arm of Claugh.

"....."

Blue-black dragons cursing the world were sealed in it.

The eight cursed dragons that release blue flames.

Looking at that,

"....."

As Ryner was looking at that,

"..... isn't there something wrong with your head?"

He muttered without thinking.

That was how abnormal the curse sealed in Claugh's arm was.

On releasing the curse, the dragons will fly from Claugh's arm all at once.

And then attack the enemy.

Anyone who's bitten will be engulfed by the curse in an instant, and have his life force seeped away.

However, he won't die immediately. Despite having his life force seeped away, he won't die. Without dying, he will become a puppet of the person who has afflicted him with the curse, and live for ten hours.

After ten hours have passed, the curse will run its course and

disintegrate his body, killing him.

“.....”

On seeing that effect alone, Ryner understood how convenient the curse was. A magic that can kill and make the victim his puppet.

If it’s used on the battlefield, it will be an extraordinary powerful and convenient magic.

However, it’s not practical.

The **forbidden curse** that’s sealed is not something that can be used.

Why is that so?

The reason is simple.

This magic has too many flaws.

First, the burden on the user is too heavy. During its use, the user’s body will have to go through an excruciating amount of pain. The intensity of pain is so great that it’s impossible for one to retain his consciousness --- no, if it doesn’t go well, it won’t be strange even if he dies from shock.

But yet, why was Claugh, who was about to activate his curse, able to retain his consciousness? This was something Ryner could not understand.

On top of that, on activating the magic, even if all eight dragons can be released, only at most three of them can be controlled.

The remaining five will attack their surroundings indiscriminately.

In other words, if there were comrades around, it can't be used. No, in that case, there was a chance that the remaining dragons will attack their user.

And if he's bitten, death will surely come pay a visit.

"....."

No matter how he looked at the Claugh who was about to activate his curse before him, he could only see that it was a foolishly flawed magic.

Such a magic should not have been usable.

"....."

But Claugh released that magic which should not have been usable.

"You're kidding right."

As Ryner groaned, Claugh's arm was clad in blue black fire and the eight dragons came forth.

And then three out of those looked around their surroundings. After ascertaining that there was no target, they went after Claugh's shoulder, waist, and foot, devouring them.

A sure-death curse.

The most terrible curse.

A curse of despair.

And Claugh should have readily died --- from his own curse that was invading him.

"....."

But that red hair muscle brain seemed completely fine and a smile floated on his face. And he ignored two other dragons which further went on to bite at his neck.

Looking at that, Ryner,

“..... are you immune to the curse?”

“.....”

But Claugh did not answer. Only a smile of delight floated on his face. Embedded with killing intent, his piercing eyes looked towards here .

And then Claugh said.

“Now, the preparations have been made. Let’s kill each other seriously, shall we? **Greatest Magician of Roland**-kun.”

In a flash.

Two dragons were released from Claugh’s arm.

“Woah.”

Ryner uttered as he dodged.

One came from his right.

The other came from above.

Their movements were not that fast. It was possible to dodge.

But, on top of that,

“..... what I seek is iridescent destruction.....”

On hearing Claugh’s voice,

“Seriously!?”

Ryner shouted as he looked towards Claugh. Claugh was drawing out a magical inscription with his left hand. The magic being deployed was **Kuuri**.

Firing spears of light, among Roland’s magic, it was one with the most destructive power.

It was of a high difficulty level, and not usable by one without a good mind.

To say it clearly, if a muscle brain, who can already move fast and has great strength, could use such a spell, he will be way too powerful! As he wanted to make a comeback, he turned to the Claugh who was wielding both a powerful magic and a **forbidden curse** at the same time,

“Isn’t this too unfair!”

Ryner hollered.

But a smile floated on Claugh’s face again,

“Who in the world was the one who said that you have to play fair?”

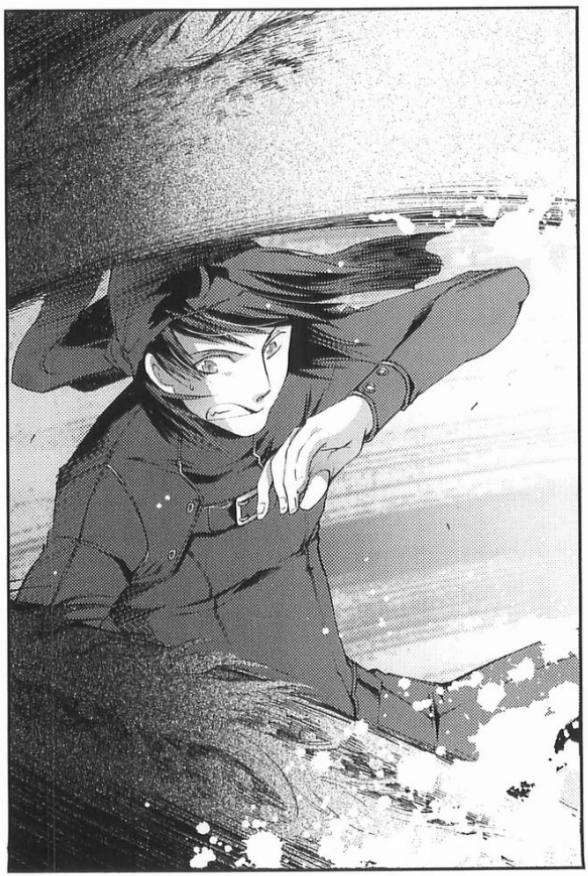
At that moment, Claugh had completed his **Kuuri**.

But, on seeing that, Ryner frantically drew his magic inscription in the air,

“What I seek is iridescent destruction...”

He chanted the same magic as Claugh.

And then.



"**Kuuri**"

Their magic were activated at the same time.

Light started to gather at the center of both their magic inscriptions. And then, for the sake of killing the enemy, the multi-colored beams that were conjured were fired, and

clashed with each other.

Instantly.

A strong eye-dazzling light was dispersed into their surroundings, but, in such a dangerous situation, if he were to shut his eyes from the blinding light even for an instant, he would be killed. So he squinted his eyes to ascertain his surroundings, and with all his might, he retreated backwards.

Towards the forest where he was hiding earlier from Claugh, who was on top of the hill.

But,

“I won’t let you escape.”

He heard the voice of Claugh --- the monster called the death god of the battlefield.

While he was pursued by a monster with a power which he never encountered before,

“Ahh noww, this is terriblyyyyyyyyy bothersomeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!”

Ryner withdrew into the forest.

The forest of the deep night.

Today’s weather was fine, and though the moonlight lit up the surroundings, it did not reach the inside of the forest.

Despite the fact that it should have been advantageous to escaping.

Just a casual glance towards his back yielded a sight of flaming blue-black dragons coming from behind, right after Ryner,

“Shit!?”

He rolled onto the ground and dodged them. Immediately after that, he stood up, kicked the tree to his left, and jumped. He further went on to grab hold of a branch of a tree in front of him, then used it as a foothold, and went further up.

Up.

Up.

And then he turned his head around.

As he turned his head around in order to ascertain where his enemy was on the ground,

“Slow.”

Immediately, just right behind him, Claugh’s left fist came flying towards Ryner,

“How the heck can you be so fast!”

Ryner moaned as he pushed the fist aside.

Following that, he avoided the oncoming dragons and sent a kick towards Claugh’s face, but it was dodged.

At the same time, Ryner grabbed hold of another tree branch near him, and pulled himself towards a different tree, and then jumped.

Of course, Claugh was following right behind him, but Ryner could no longer turn his head around as that would surely get him chomped up by the dragons behind him.

Flying from tree to tree, and while doing that, Ryner drew a glowing magical inscription in the air.

And he completed it.

He chanted.

“WHAT I SEEK IS BURNING FIELDS >>> KURENAI”

Instantly, exploding flames burst out from the Ryner’s magical construct and sprung in the direction behind him, and then coming from behind him,

“WHAT I SEEK IS WATER MIST >>> MISUMI”

He heard the incantation of a magic that would bring forth an exploding jet of water.

As the flames and water clashed, the hissing sound of water turning into steam could be heard, but yet, Ryner did not look back.

But, *Ahhhh, dang, he got me, what kind of monster is this!* He complained silently.

“.....”

Dang, he really got me.

The plan was to quickly defeat Claugh, restrain him, and use him as a hostage for many things.

But yet, what’s this?

What the hell is this?

Ryner gave a quick glance towards the monster that was chasing him from behind.

He looked at the form of Claugh, who was sending his cursed dragons towards him while in pursuit.

“.....”

And then he started to believe somewhat. He started to believe somewhat in the rumor of him being able to turn the tide of a battle all by himself as he appears on a battlefield.

This really is a monster.

Using the **forbidden curse**, with a higher level of physical ability than Ryner, and on top of that, he readily deployed a counter magic to neutralize Ryner’s **Kurenai**.

That was some kind of an impossible strength.

It was a strength that would make one want to get away in a flash.

“.....”

But, he couldn’t run away.

No matter what it took, it was necessary for Ryner to make this fella a hostage.

It was necessary to make this monster whom god may even fear a hostage.

It was for the sake of stopping the most terrible war that was going on in these lands.

Capturing Claugh was absolutely necessary for the sake of stopping this war started by his best friend, the Hero King of the largest country in the southern part of the continent, Roland Empire, Sion Astal.

“.....”

Ryner once again gave a quick glance behind him, looking intently at the red haired monster who was closing in . And

then.

“..... it seems like it’s completely impossible to restrain him.....”

Ryner said with a exasperated voice.

He was way too naive. To have thought of restraining this fella all by himself, he was so naive that he wanted to beat himself up.

If he was seriously wanting to kill him, this could end up in a draw, he thought. But if he were to end up killing him, then it would become meaningless.

It was necessary to keep this red haired monster who was known as Sion’s right hand man, alive, restrain him, and on top of that, threaten him, and make him a hostage.

And once again,

“Ugh ~ super bothersome.”

Ryner groaned as he said.

“So as to speak, I really hate this kind of bothersome stuff.”

He lamented.

“In the first place ~, getting chased by this monster, working hard in order to stop the war, creating world peace, to say this clearly, I'm not the least interested at all, let some other hero-wannabe take on such bothersome stuff.....”

At that moment, from behind him, the blue black dragons again come biting,

“Woah, that’s really dangerous, no, someone save me please, I seriously hope this will stop! I really hate working hard like

this!”

He yelled, and from behind him, Claugh said.

“Then, get on with it and die.”

“You are right. If I just die, I can relax and struggle no more, isn’t it.”

“I’ll lend you my hand.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah.”

“Then I shall accept your kind offer, will you kill me ~”

Even as he said that, Ryner’s feet kept moving. While jumping from tree to tree, he drew glowing words in the air.

That was a magic which he had previously stolen from the mage knight battalion of the Kingdom of Estabul. Looking back, this was something from a long time ago. It was during the time when he and Sion were still students and fighting the mage knight battalion of the Kingdom of Estabul; a magic he copied when he was in danger of getting killed.

He’s using that magic now.

“I OFFER THE CONTRACTED WORDS, LETTING THE SLUMBERING MALICIOUS SPIRIT DWELL WITHIN”

Instantly.

Ryner’s body appeared to shimmer. At the same time, his speed increased.

The magic he chanted was one that released the limiter in his mind, and allowed his physical abilities to increase

dramatically.

And then a smile floated on his face,

“Alright. Preparations done. With this, it’s time to fight a little with the monster.....”

In the midst of saying that.

He once again heard the voice of Claugh from behind him.

The voice of Claugh chanting.

But, in response to those words, Ryner,

“.....”

His eyes widened and he turned his head around in shock.

As he did that, Claugh’s spell was completed.

The glowing words that appeared from his left hand were the same as those drawn out by Ryner seconds ago.

The same construct.

The same magic.

But that was something impossible.

Because it was Estabul’s magic.

It was a pretty high level magic, which only pretty excellent magic scholars, after studying the basics and architectural constructs of Estabul’s magic, could acquire after three or four years.

A normal soldier couldn’t possibly use it.

No, even if the soldier is a capable one, he shouldn't be able to use it.

And besides, it was not even two years since Estabul had been absorbed by Roland. Even if both sides were to exchange and share magical knowledge they possess, many years should have been needed before a soldier could use it.

Of course, it was a different story for people like Ryner who could copy magic with their special eyes, but he had never heard that Claugh was an **Alpha Stigma** bearer.

Then, how was it done?

How did this fella accomplish it?

"You..... how in the world did you manage to learn Estabul's magic?"

On hearing Ryner's question, Claugh shrugged his shoulders readily,

"..... hard work?"

"Huhh? It's not something you can achieve by hard work alone, isn't it?"

"It might be so for a normal person. But it seems like I'm a genius, you know?"

"Uweh ~, a person who calls himself a genius has to be an ordinary person..."

However, Claugh was undoubtedly a genius.

It was something he had already recognized.

Even when Ryner was active in Roland's covert ops group, he had never quite seen any monster like that.

On top of that, those geniuses who were not spoiled and actually put in hard work simply didn't exist.

Ryner,

"This could be bad."

As he groaned, Claugh laughed 'haha'. As he laughed, he chanted.

Estabul's magic.

"I OFFER THE CONTRACTED WORDS, LETTING THE SLUMBERING MALICIOUS SPIRIT DWELL WITHIN"

As he did that, the magic really activated.

The magic which should not have been usable by a Roland soldier was activated.

Claugh's body started shimmering faintly, and in one breath, his movement speed increased.

He closed the gap.

Those movements of his were even faster than the magically sped-up Ryner.

Ryner was already at a loss.

Ryner was at a loss of what to do with such a monster all by himself.

And Claugh delightfully,

"What's this. Just running away, isn't that boring? Or is this all you've got? Perhaps, this Estabul magic was your trump card? If that's the case....."

At that moment, he further went on to increase his speed. He kicked a tree with all his strength, closed in the gap between him and Ryner, side by side with him, he looked at him and said.

“..... can I finally kill you now?”

Ryner looked at Claugh’s face,

“You can’t.”

He replied.

“Alright. Then I shall kill you.”

“Didn’t I say that you can’t!”

“Haha. You’re noisy.”

As he said that, Claugh swung his right arm. Three blue-black flaming dragons were about to attack Ryner.

On seeing that, Ryner,

“Ahh ~”

He said.

Ahh, he said it with a really exasperated voice.

Ahh, I can’t take this anymore.

“..... if I don’t fight seriously, I’ll really get killed.....”

He said.

His opponent was fighting seriously with an intent to kill. It’s time for him to get serious and do the same as well.

His original plan to defeat his opponent and restrain him had to be changed.

No, well, he had another plan that could have settled things without fighting, but it seemed like it wouldn't come through in time.

If, there's a one in million chance that Claugh is insanely strong --- no, he is in fact strong --- and Ryner could no longer cope with it; there was in fact another plan for such a situation, but,

"..... if I wait for that, I might be killed. Then."

At that moment, Ryner's eyes changed into a sharp piercing gaze.

Following that, in his head, a battle plan against Claugh started unfolding.

There were three parts to it.

First, sidestep his opponent's attack.

Second, trick him.

Third, kill him.

"..... shall I get started?"

At that moment, Ryner stepped onto a large branch, and turned and changed the direction he was facing.

In response to that, Claugh also stopped in his tracks on the large branch. And then,

"Orh, at last, you're getting serious?"

As he said that, he made a guarded face, having realized that

Ryner's aura had changed.

On seeing that, *this fella is really a tough nut to crack*, Ryner thought as he scowled again.

If he were to let his guard down, it would be possible for Ryner to take advantage of an opening without killing him.

However, there was entirely none at all.

Even though from appearances, he seemed to be enjoying the fight from his broad grin, he was certainly not fooling around.

That's why, with a sad and tired looking face, Ryner said.

"Geez, I really don't want to kill you, you know."

On hearing that, as expected while looking as if he was enjoying himself, Claugh,

"An interesting joke."

"Isn't it?"

"Furthermore, you won't be able to kill me."

"Perhaps. But, you won't know till I try."

"I know."

"Really, I wonder?"

"Yeah."

"I see..... well, it'd be a bother, but let's get on with it."

"Hurry up and get on with it."

"Yeah."

After he nodded, Ryner, for once, drew out all his strength. And he turned off the switch. That was the switch in his head. He released the inhibition in which he would unconsciously take it easy on his opponent. Following that, he gradually lowered his stance. While drawing soft breaths, he gathered power into his body.

And then,

“Here goes.”

At the same time he spoke.

He released all the built-up energy in his body.

In a breath, he lunged at Claugh.

Even though Claugh set two of his dragons on him, he readily dodged. While dodging, he drew out magical inscriptions in mid-air.

A complex construct. As he quickly drew out an elaborate magical construct, Claugh reacted.

The magic that Ryner drew out was the same as before. The flame magic which Claugh had counteracted with **Misumi** previously, **Kurenai**.

He chanted that once again.

With a relaxed expression, Claugh began,

“That’s the same one as before.”

He said, and then started chanting **Misumi**.

But that was a fake.

Rather, the **Kurenai** Ryner had cast earlier was a fake.

Earlier, Ryner had intentionally activated **Kurenai** at a slow pace. His real magical construction ability was at a speed so fast that there was no way Claugh would have time to finish chanting a counter-spell.

But, earlier, he had chanted his magic slowly.

In order to make Claugh think that he was superior in his magical construction ability, and induce a mistake from him, he had chanted his magic slowly intentionally.

And Claugh had fallen into his trap.

On seeing Ryner's **Kurenai**, Claugh started chanting **Misumi** at a relaxed pace.

But he was too late.

He was entirely too late.

From here on, in the time before Claugh could finish constructing his **Misumi**, he would already be done with **Kurenai's** inscription, and on top of that, he would be able to thrust his hand into the magical inscription of **Misumi** that Claugh was drawing, and change the construct.

That's why,

"It's the end."

As he said that, he immediately completed **Kurenai**, and further went on to thrust his hand into Claugh's magical inscription of **Misumi**.

On seeing that, at last, Claugh's expression changed.

"Damn you."

As he said that, he gave up on working on his magical

construct, and started attacking Ryner instead, but he was too late.

The **Kurenai** behind Ryner had started activating.

Flames had gathered in the center of the magical inscription, and was aimed in Claugh's direction,

"Shit."

Claugh groaned. Following that, he extended a dragon from his right arm, which bit onto a tree some distance away from him, and subsequently, he was reeled towards it.

With that, he somehow managed to evade the flaming missiles, but that was the end.

Ryner had completed changing the **Misumi** drawn out by Claugh, forcibly changing it to **Kuuri**.

And aiming it towards Claugh,

"WHAT I SEEK IS IRIDESCENT DESTRUCTION >>>....."

As he was chanting the spell, and just as he was about to fire off **Kuuri**, his hand stopped moving.

Following that, he slowly.

"....."

He slowly shifted his line of sight, and looked at the dragon shrouded in blue-black flames, which was about to bite into the back of his neck.

Before he knew it, a dragon, with an instant death curse embedded within its fangs, had encircled him from behind and was in position to bite into his neck.

If Claugh were to order it, in a flash, Ryner would be killed.

However, it was the same the other way round.

Kuuri was almost completed. What's left was the incantation --- just one more line to utter, once the incantation was completed, Claugh would be impaled by **Kuuri** and die. At this kind of near distance, no matter how his body movements had been sped up, he wouldn't be able to dodge.

It was one more step for the both of them.

Both of them were in a position to kill each other in just about a tenth of a second.

Ryner turned his eyes to face the Claugh who was hanging from his dragon clinging on to a tree some distance away.

"..... damn. After getting so serious, it's a tie."

"....."

But Claugh did not answer.

Ryner shrugged his shoulders,

"So, what's next? If we end it in a tie like this, it'd be a little fruitless, I think."

As he was staring at Ryner, Claugh said.

"I don't think so. You are strong enough to make me think that it's better to kill you here even if it's a tie."

"Ah-rah? Are those words of praise?"

"You can take it that way."

"Then shall we call it a tie?"

“.....”

Claugh glowered at him. And his killing intent further swelled up.

An intent to kill.

An intent to kill by sacrificing himself.

And there was no way the both of them could evade each other’s attacks.

It was the worst.

It was the worst kind of situation.

But still, even so,

“.....”

A smile floated on Ryner’s face.

A relaxed smile. It was his usual languid, unmotivated smile.

On seeing that, Claugh raised his eyebrows in puzzlement.

“Why did you smile?”

But Ryner,

“No, I think in the end, it’s my win.”

“Huh? How so? Where did your chance of winning come.....”

However.

At that point, Claugh stopped his words. And then Claugh’s sharp expression contorted.

Ryner looked at him and smiled.

“Ah, you’ve noticed?”

“.....”

As expected, Claugh did not answer.

But, it didn’t matter anyhow.

Then Ryner turned his gaze to behind Claugh.

He was looking in the direction of the place where the original alternative plan of capturing Claugh, the plan that he was previously waiting for, had activated.

Behind the Claugh who was hanging from a tree.

Below him, a peerless beauty was looking up at them.

With long golden hair, and clear blue eyes. An extraordinary well featured face. Wearing a one-piece [1] with a short skirt portion that was unsuitable for a battlefield. At the waist portion of that one-piece, she wore a long sword which those slender arms of hers do not seem capable of wielding, and as usual, in her right hand was a skewer of dango.

Ryner’s partner, Ferris Eris.

Ferris was looking up at them with an uninterested look.

“What? Didn’t you say *Single-handedly, I’ll win effortlessly puppu* ~ in a high and mighty manner, and you’re still fighting like an idiot?”

She said.

On hearing that, Ryner smiled wryly,

“I never did say *I’ll win effortlessly puppu*~.”

“Then it’s *poppo* -?”

“No, there’s not where the problem is..... this fella is a thousand times stronger than I thought, you know.”

“Isn’t it because you’re weak?”

“No, to fight such an opponent till this point, I would even praise myself for it.”

As he said that, Ryner looked at Claugh.

As always, he had a stern face. No, it was a face of someone desperately thinking about how to break out of this situation.

It was the face of a fellow who refuses to give up no matter how bad the situation was.

Seeing that, Ryner frowned and began,

“But, it’s useless, you see, Claugh? Your loss is set. No matter how strong you are, you won’t be a match for both me and Ferris, besides.....”

At that moment, Ryner looked at Ferris again. No, he was looking at the trump card of his plan, which she had been dragging along with her left hand.

“.....”

Trump card --- gripped at the nape of the neck and dragged along by Ferris, an unconscious, young, blond man.

This was another plan that Ryner had devised.

In the situation where he were to carry out negotiations with Claugh, in order to make him listen to his demands and on top of that have him accept them, it was necessary to have an advantageous leverage of such an extent.

What could he do to bring about this?

One.

Ryner to beat down Claugh and capture him. But there was a danger to that. If Claugh was stronger than he thought --- well, as a matter of fact, he's really a thousand times stronger than he thought --- in reverse, Ryner might be killed instead, and on top of that, even if he could capture Claugh, there was also the possibility that he would not submit and say something like *Kill me!*, and not listen to Ryner's demands. Furthermore, fighting him with Ferris at the onset was also not an option. If they did that, then it's possible that Claugh's comrades would reinforce him and with a large army against them, they would have no chance of winning at all.

That's why, so as to speak, Ryner had another plan prepared.

Ryner would attack Claugh alone, and draw him away from the camp, and in the meantime ---

"....."

At that moment, Ryner looked down at the man dragged by Ferris,

"Well, is that the guy?"

Ferris nodded.

"The vice officer of that red haired man. The name is Shuss Shirazz. *If I'm to become a burden to Field Marshal Klom, I'll kill myself*, as he was saying that, I knocked him out."

Ferris said.

Ryner began delightedly,

"I see ~. You sure have an excellent subordinate, don't you,

Claugh-chan ~.”

As he said that, he looked at Claugh.

Without saying anything, he glared at Ryner.

But, Ryner appeared indifferent. He only had to move according to his plan.

He grabbed hold of the dragon which was about to bite into his neck.

“Well now, first, dismiss this dragon. Just killing me alone, and in exchange for that, losing the lives of the famous Claugh Klom-sama, and the capable vice officer Shuss Shirazz, that won’t make it too worthwhile right?”

He said.

On hearing that, while Claugh continued glaring at him,

“..... what do you want?”

He said in a low, menacing voice.

However, in response to those words, a smile surfaced on Ryner’s face.

All this while, he had been working hard at getting those words out from his opponent.

And there was only one thing he wished for.

Can you give me some time?

That was it.

Even for him, he was well aware of the current situation in Roland Empire.

The fact that Roland was currently invading Nelpha, and carrying out large scale massacres as a show to kill the other countries' spirit of putting up a resistance.

After showing the massacre in Nelpha, it would strike a dent into the other countries' will to resist, and Roland could get them to surrender without fighting.

That was a necessary path to a minimum loss of lives and the fastest way to end the war.

That was what Sion had seemingly considered.

Even though he hated wars, he hated people dying, and he hated causing grief to others, that was the path that Sion had seemingly considered, choosing to shoulder all the burden upon himself.

And Ryner also understood the need for such a war.

Even though he couldn't accept it, but on this Menoris continent where the flames of war were spreading fiercely, he could understand how that was the only available choice.

That's why *would you give some time to Nelpha?*, that's what Ryner had come to negotiate about.

What's transpiring in Imperial Nelpha right now could be said to be the worst case scenario for both Nelpha and Roland.

Sion's plan was probably to invade Nelpha with an overwhelming force and secure a swift surrender.

No, that really did happen.

The benevolent king of Nelpha, Gread Nelphi,

"I shall offer my own head and the confinement of my son, Prince Starnel..... so in exchange, would you stop massacring

Nelpha's people?"

That was the proposal he had intended to put forth to Roland.

However, just before that, the stupid son Prince Starnel, caring only about his own life, went berserk.

First, he killed his own father, Gread Nelphi, and slammed down the declaration of surrender.

On top of that, in order to buy time for his own escape, he sent forth ten thousand soldiers to clash with Roland's forces, ordering them to repel Roland.

Furthermore, he commanded the remaining sixty eight thousand troops himself and started massacring and looting his own people.

That was a worst case scenario that was already beyond anyone's expectations.

With this, until Roland had killed the unyielding stupid son, the war had to continue.

Destroying all the cities, killing all the soldiers, completely obliterating Nelpha, and the need to show all this to the entire world.

The reason was because, thanks to the stupid son who valued his life more than the country and people, Nelpha would never surrender.

However, in such a dreadful worst case scenario, it was not without a glimmer of hope.

That would be Toale Nelphi.

The son of that stupid prince Starnel and his commoner mistress, who one year ago, extended his hand to help Ryner

and Ferris, who should have been strangers to him and had somewhat drifted to Nelpha while they were searching for relics, a kind, nice kid, that Toale, who of course was much more popular than the stupid prince Starnel among the populace, had stepped out to take command of the abandoned ten thousand troops and stopped them from advancing.

He stopped a pointless clash between Roland and Nelpha's armies.

And Roland should be happy about that as well.

Since with the appearance of Toale, Roland's original goal of minimizing the loss of lives and making Nelpha submit was once again possible.

And the wise Toale would definitely,

"I will surrender, so could you let the ten thousand soldiers and people off?"

He would request.

Of course, Roland would refuse. Since if Roland were to let them off, then it would not be able to make a display to the other countries.

That's why Roland would tell Toale,

"Go take the throne from the current king of Nelpha, from that stupid prince. After that, if you make a surrender to Roland, we will accept it. Of course, in order to make a show to the other countries, Toale Nelphi of royal lineage will be executed....."

And Toale would definitely accept. If he's able to save everyone with his life, Toale would accept.

However, regarding that demand, it would be a pretty unreasonable one.

The reason was because right now, Toale only had ten thousand soldiers with him.

On the other hand, Starnel was commanding a sixty eight thousand troop army.

Roughly seven times.

No matter one thought about it, not a single chance of winning could be seen.

On top of that, even if Toale were to win, what was going to come after that would be his execution.

And furthermore, Toale would accept that execution with a smiling face.

And there's no way he could be saved, something at the level that would make one cry out *what the hell's that*,

That's why.

"....."

Could you please wait a while, that's the bargain Ryner wanted to strike.

With even less sacrifices.

In order to advance in the direction of a scenario with even less people getting hurt, Ryner had come to strike a deal with Claugh.

The time for Ryner to go capture Prince Starnel alone.

And the time for Toale to escape out of the country before the

situation whereby the royalty of Nelpha gets killed arose.

In order to accomplish these two things, he needed the time.

Even though Ryner came here to ask for more time, there was no way he could say that he needed more time and expect it to be given to him.

That's why Ryner said.

"For now, could you leave your troops here and return to Sion's side?"

On hearing that.

Claugh, while glaring at Ryner,

"..... I see. You're trying to buy time."

He said.

With only one sentence from Ryner, Claugh could get roughly what Ryner was thinking about.

Furthermore, Claugh said.

"But, why are you supporting Nelpha? It has nothing to do with....."

But, Ryner interrupted there,

"Toale is my friend. And, I can't betray my friends..... well, it's some ultra naive talk, can you agree to it?"

On hearing those words,

"....."

A slight smile floated on Claugh's face. But it's not a mocking

smile.

“Are you agreeing to it?”

“.....”

But, as expected, Claugh did not reply. And without replying to that question,

“However, what’s in it for me to cooperate with you in saving your friend? Are you going to abduct Starnel and bring him to me?”

“Yeah.”

Ryner nodded, and Claugh laughed.

“Ha. That’s an unnecessary thing. If it’s just that, we could do it as well. Supporting Toale Nelphi, killing Starnel, and executing Toale after that. The only difference our methods lies only in whether Toale is going to die or not. However, in order to make a demonstration to the other countries, we need to kill Toale. Roland is no longer a cowardly country that will let someone of royal lineage and who has commanded an army once live.”

“Is that Sion’s view?”

“That’s right. Sion’s different from you, he wouldn’t sacrifice the lives of others just for the sake of saving one life.”

“.....”

That’s right, Ryner thought.

Claugh’s words.

The path that Sion was taking.

There was nothing more right than that.

But even if this was said to be right, it didn't mean that everyone would follow along with it, Ryner thought.

Even if this was said to be right, it didn't mean that everyone would achieve happiness, Ryner thought.

At the very least, if Toale were to die.

If he were to die, Ryner would be sad.

No, not just Ryner. Toale is a well-liked person. He is well-liked by the people of this country. To kill the Toale who is well-liked the people of this country was not really a good choice for the Roland that's subjugating Nelpha from here on, Ryner thought.

Of course, it would be good for an instant. To overwhelm Nelpha with fear, and to overwhelm the neighbouring countries, and to further overwhelm their neighbouring countries, if it were to sweep across everything with its might alone, then that choice might be the correct one, but was there really a need to move forward in such a hurry?

A little.

Wouldn't it be a good thing to take things a little more slowly, and move forward along a path that could bring a smile to everyone.....

"..... that's how the naive stupid me thinks though."

He murmured as he was looking southwards, in the direction where Sion was, the direction of Roland.

And Claugh who could hardly hear him,

"Huh?"

He said, but Ryner appeared indifferent to that.

He turned to face Claugh again,

“Well, I’ve already known right at the start that you are going to reject my offer though.”

“Then, that’s the end of our talk. Let’s get on with the killing.”

“That’s why I was saying, if we do that, it’ll be unfavorable against you.....”

But, a smile surfaced on Claugh’s face again,

“I have the confidence to evade your **Kuuri**. The one’s who’s gonna die is only you.”

He said something scary.

On hearing that, Ryner,

“..... even for me..... erm..... I also have the confidence to probably dodge your dragon barely, you know?”

“Right.”

“No, I’m serious. Anyway, even for you, it’ll be by a hair’s breadth to dodge **Kuuri**.”

“We’ll know for certain once we try it.”

“No no, that’s why I say, once we try it, we can’t take our actions back anymore. And besides, if we do that, what’s going to happen to Shuss? I’ll dodge the dragon. You’ll dodge **Kuuri**. But the hostage Shuss.....”

But, while smiling, Claugh said.

“For a soft, naive person like you, can you kill a hostage, I

wonder?”

On hearing those words.

A wry smile surfaced on Ryner’s face,

“..... ah-rah, you really hit where it hurts. But, to go against such a naive opponent, do you really need to fight so frenziedly? Do you really think such a naive guy will become a threat to you in the future?”

This time round, it was Claugh’s turn to smile wryly.

“..... no, I don’t think so.”

“Isn’t it? Then, why don’t you listen to me till the end? At any rate, the things we say will just be nonsense, unsophisticated stuff that can’t pose a threat to you, so if you’re willing to listen to me with a magnanimous heart, I’ll be really happy, I guess.”

On hearing those words.

Claugh appeared to consider those words for a moment. Seconds later, appearing to have reached a decision, he closed one eye and,

“Disppear, << Cursed Harp >>.”

He issued some kind of command, and the dragon that was poised to bite into Ryner’s neck disappeared.

On top of that, the dragons that were surrounding Claugh also disappeared and he dropped to the ground.

In response to that, Ryner,

“Ferris.”

He called out, but even before he had even done so, Ferris

was already moving towards him, dragging Shuss alongside, but.

“Hey hey, leave Shuss here.”

Claugh called out from behind Ferris, stretching out his hand.

In response to that, Ferris,

“You’re hindering me.”

As she said that, she drew the sword at her waist at an unbelievable speed. And that was already at a speed which Ryner could not follow with his eyes.

The sword was drawn at a timing which should have been impossible to evade, but,

“Woah.”

Claugh uttered as he dodged it. And following that, he caught hold of Shuss’s head. And on top of that, he picked up a fallen branch from the ground and attempted to thrust it towards Ferris.

“Hm?”

Ferris turned her body, and sidestepped it. At that instant, Claugh straightened his stance. While hauling Shuss towards him, his right hand started drawing a glowing magical inscription.

And as Ferris was about to slice at that magical inscription with her sword.

At that moment, Ryner,

“That’s enough Ferris. Come back for now.”

He said.

Immediately, Ferris reacted and jumped a step backward. She further went on to kick the ground, then kicked a tree trunk, and landed on the branch next to the branch that Ryner was standing on.

For some reason, she had a dissatisfied look on her face,

“That red head..... he’s much stronger than the last time I fought him.”

“Hn? Even Ferris had a go with him before?”

“Yeah. It was three years ago. It was on Sion’s orders, I recall.”

“I see. So, did you win?”

“We didn’t manage to finish it.”

“Then, can you win now?”

I wonder?, Ferris tilted her head in such a manner in response, after which, a faint smile, which would have been indecipherable by other onlookers, floated on her face,

“But, together with you, he won’t be a match.”

She said.

Ryner nodded and smiled thinly.

And then, he looked down at Claugh.

“Well then, are you ready to listen to what I have to say now? Even with Shuss returned to you, the situation hasn’t changed one bit. You won’t be a match for the both of us. Even if there are moves we can’t use because of our naivety, the situation won’t change. That’s why, there is no good reason for you to easily dismiss what I have to say..... so will you listen to me

right till the end?”

“What if I refuse?”

“Then Ferris and I will make lots of holes in you and slowly, I shall say what I want to say right next to your ear.”

On hearing that, Claugh grimaced.

“How annoying.”

He said and Ryner smiled.

“Really? Are we really that annoying?”

“Uwah, these guys are really annoying..... that’s why I’ve told Sion this, *don’t mix around with that dubious* ***Alpha Stigma*** *bearer*..... well, it seems like I don’t have a choice. So, speak. At any rate, I won’t be listening to your bullshit, but somehow, right now, since you guys have the upper hand, I’ll just stay still and ignore you for a while.”[2]

“Alright, I did it. Well then, please hear me out.”

“Though even if I hear you out, things won’t go the way you want, and nothing will change.”

That was what Claugh said, but a smile floated on Ryner’s lips.

Since things were moving along according to his plans.

Ryner said.

“You know, Claugh. Sion is trying to show the might of Roland to the world right?”

On hearing that, Claugh scowled with an annoyed face,

“I told you I’m ignoring you, and didn’t say that I’ll answer your questions one by one.”

“You’re mean.”

“Whatever, just move on.”

Ryner shrugged his shoulders and continued.

“In other words, this invasion against Nelpha must succeed at all costs.”

“.....”

“To achieve that perfectly. In order to make Nelpha and the other countries shake in complete fear of Roland’s might, and kill their spirit to resist Roland, it is necessary for Roland to overwhelm Nelpha.”

“.....”

“However, if say, in the midst of it, a rumor about Roland’s army losing somewhere spreads, what will you do?”

At that question, Claugh finally responded. With piercing eyes, he looked at Ryner,

“..... what on earth are you scheming? In this southern part of the continent, there’s no longer any country that has the power to go against Roland.....”

But Ryner interrupted.

“Yeah, you’re probably right.”

He said.

And that was the truth.

Nelpha, and Roland's ally Runa Empire, as well as the Cassla north of them, not one of these countries would probably have a fighting force that would be a match for Roland.

Roland was blessed with an excellent king. A king who would not rest, who would not slack, and on top of that possesses a brilliant mind, a king who would not make a mistake in his decisions.

That's why he's called the Hero King.

One who would definitely not stop moving forward, the saviour of the country, the one called Sion Astal.

As long as Sion remained as the king, the current Roland was probably peerless in power in the southern part of this continent.

But still, even so.

"..... even so, if Roland were asked whether it has enough energy to deal with both Nelpha and Runa together, what would be the answer, I wonder."

"....."

"No, that's not right. Perhaps it can really stand up to the both of them. The current Roland probably has that kind of power. But having the ability to deal with both countries at the same time and whether it's necessary to deal with both countries at the same time are two separate matters, isn't it? If you do that, there will be too many sacrifices. To become the supreme ruler of the south with the least sacrifices and in the fastest amount of time..... in other words, Sion's plan may fall apart if he had to deal with both Nelpha and Runa at the same time. If possible, I'm sure Sion would like to absorb and integrate the might of Nelpha and Runa into Roland, am I right?"

On hearing all that, Claugh already more or less had an idea of what Ryner was planning, and he glared angrily at him,

“Damn you, are you going to instigate Runa to start a war with Roland?”

He said and in response to that, Ryner smiled. He smiled delightedly.

And then,

“No, I’m going for something more distasteful.”

He said.

Ryner was brewing a really bad-ass plan.

It was bad-ass to Roland.

No, even to Nelpha, to Runa, to everything, it was a bad-ass plan.

Ryner told him of that plan.

“Didn’t you guys lose track of the location of Toale and his ten thousand soldiers?”

On hearing that, Claugh glowered at him and said.

“So, it’s your damn doing?”

“You can say that.”

“What the hell are you trying to accomplish?”

“Well now, what is it indeed?”

“Hurry up and spit it out. Otherwise, I’ll kill you.”

“But the current you can’t kill us.”

On hearing that, Claugh’s red eyes were filled with a scarlet hatred, and Ryner could tell they were redder and deeper, but he appeared unconcerned.

Claugh was already dancing in his palm.

Ryner knew the location of Toale, a piece of information which Roland most wanted to get hold of.

For the matter to progress, Claugh would now have to listen to what Ryner had to say.

With a smile of satisfaction, Ryner continued.

“So, where on earth did the ten thousand soldiers disappear to?”

“.....”

“The answer is at a location further east of the place where your scouts had thought where they should have been..... at a dangerous position just touching the borders of Runa, and they are still on the move in fact.”

On hearing those words, Claugh’s expression changed.

However, as expected, Ryner continued indifferently.

“And on top of that, for some reason, the ten thousand army led by Toale is carrying a Roland flag we’ve prepared..... now, what will that be for, I wonder?”

At that point, there was no longer a need to further explain it to Claugh.

Claugh had a dark look of despair and despondency on his face. That was how distasteful Ryner’s plan was.

In other words, this was what Ryner had been shooting for.

Toale would lead his ten thousand soldiers to attack Runa while carrying Roland's flag.

Of course, Runa would mistakenly think that Roland, which had acquired power and had grown impudent, had broken their alliance and come to attack them.

Runa and Roland would then probably end up being plunged into a war. Even if not so, the fact was, in order to make an example of Nelpha to the world, Roland had carried out some unseemly acts against Nelpha.

Afraid of suffering the same fate as Nelpha, Runa would do its utmost to stand up to Roland.

And it's probable that Runa would join forces with Nelpha and start to fight back against Roland.

They might even request aid from Cassla to their north.

The tyrant Sion Astal has run amok, lend us your hand in defending against Roland, such a development might unfold.

That would be the most extreme case that Roland needed to prepare itself against, that's why it's making an example of Nelpha now.

Imperial Nelpha, Runa Empire, and the Autonomous Holy City of Cassla, and the other counties in the southern part of the continent, in order not to have them gang up together, Roland had to make an example of Nelpha by crushing it.

But all that would come to naught.

All that would come to naught if Ryner and Toale were to attack Runa by masquerading as Roland's forces.

To top it off.

“..... the army we’re leading, that is ten thousand soldiers masquerading as Roland’s forces, will run away in fear upon meeting Runa..... that’s the act we’re going to put on, you know? What will happen then, I wonder? The guys from Runa, as well as from Cassla, will start thinking, *Hey, aren’t the Roland fags surprisingly weak? Is there a need to fear them?*, something like that.....”

At that moment.

“Enough.”

Claugh said. And he continued looking at Ryner.

“..... I get your shitty plan. So, what is it that you want? In exchange for not carrying out that idiotic plan to spread this war in an idiotic way, what do you want from us?”

Once again, Ryner smiled.

With his plan moving on perfectly, he smiled.

“Hadn’t I said it right at the start? Won’t you give me a little time? Won’t you give me a little time to capture Starnel and hand him over to you, and furthermore, enough time for Toale to get out of the country, that is.”

On hearing those words,

“.....”

Claugh was about to say something, but Ryner shook his head.

“Ah, but you don’t have the authority to decide, I already knew that..... for now, just go back to Sion, and tell him my proposal, that’s what I meant, so how does that sound?”

Continuing to look intently at Ryner, Claugh,

“..... so, during this time, you’re going to catch hold of Starnel?”

“Exactly.”

“Can you do it?”

“Well, please wait for me till I get it done.”

Once again, Claugh appeared to consider. He averted his eyes from Ryner and looked behind him at his camp and then,

“..... fine. I will go ask Sion. But as to how Sion will reply.”

But, that was interrupted by Ryner.

“Sion will agree to my plan. Since this is the path to the least number of sacrifices. That’s the kind of guy he is.”

He said.

He had come to understand Sion well after spending the past few years with him.

Sion would definitely jump at the proposal that Ryner had put forth in this current situation.

On the surface, Roland could not save Toale outright. Since this would show a weakness of Roland to the other countries.

However, if a third party --- for example, in this case, Ryner --- a person who had no affiliation with Roland were to save Toale, what would happen?

In that case, it would not show Roland as being soft. That’s why Ryner had the confidence that Sion would jump onto his proposal.

And Claugh should also understand that. Claugh's expression relaxed slightly.

He turned to face Ryner.

"..... but from now on, you should know that you will be carrying the lives of a pretty large number of people on your shoulders right?"

He said to Ryner.

On hearing that, Ryner,

"....."

He smiled with a slightly weary look and shrugged his shoulders.

Since he had already known this a long time ago.

The lives of the ten thousand soldiers led by Toale.

The lives of the hundreds of thousands of people of Nelpha to be massacred by Roland in its campaign.

The almost seventy thousand lives of the troops led by Starnel.

The tens of thousands of victims on Roland's side.

Sion could not save them.

Carrying everything upon himself alone, crying and hollering in anguish, and even so, Sion had to continue moving forward and could not save them.

That's why, those lives exceeding hundreds of thousands rest on Ryner's plan.

For the first time, the lives of other people rest heavily on Ryner's shoulders.

In response to that,

"....."

He truly felt like running away.

It was frightening, heavy, and painful enough to make him feel like crying, he thought.

But, he could no longer.

"....."

He could no longer run away from it anymore.

He had always let Sion carry the heavy burdens, and he himself had been running away all this while, so he could no longer run away from it anymore.

He had to fight alongside him.

If the next time he met him, he would still want to call himself a friend, he could no longer afford not to fight; it would be inexcusable.

That's why Ryner looked down at Claugh and said.

"..... I shall carry them properly, I think. Since I had been letting Sion carry them all this while, I shall carry them properly. That's why, could you tell Sion about it. The words I've said earlier....."

"Huh? The words you've said earlier? What words? Regarding giving you more time?"

On hearing that, Ryner grimaced and,

“No..... ermm, that, it’s that, you know. The same reason for saving Toale that I was mentioning about, it’s the same for Sion..... tell him that for me.”

He said.

The same reason behind him saving Toale.

That was,

"I can’t betray my friends."

Those words.

Those stinking words that were embarrassing to the point that one could die if he hears them from the other party himself, but currently, it was necessary.

In order to make this plan succeed.

In order to stop the Sion who was running amok all by himself, shouldering everything upon himself.

That’s why, Claugh scowled.

“Why do I have to say such embarrassing words!”

“Ah, ah, they are really embarrassing huh?”

“Beyond embarrassing, gross!”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“But, still tell him that for me.”

“Don’t shit me!”

“Ehh, if you don’t do it, this plan won’t succeed, so c’mon, please ~”

On hearing those words, Claugh’s scowl increasingly deepened.

And then, from beside Ryner,

“Yeah. And one more thing, tell Sion to immediately send two thousand cases of dango skewers from Wynitt dango shop.....”

“As if I can tell him that!”

Claugh shouted angrily, and then sighed in exasperation.

“Seriously, why is it that I can actually overlook all the annoying things that you guys put me through throughout our entire meeting..... I’m really shocked for a change.”

On hearing those words, Ryner and Ferris,

“Hahhahha.”

“Fuffuffu.”

“Duh, super annoy.....”

Once again, Claugh sighed.

Following that, he picked the fallen Shuss up,

“Well, since the proposal you’ve put forth does have some benefits to our side, I’ll properly transmit it to Sion. So, in exchange for that, make sure you succeed, get it?”

Ryner nodded.

“Well, I’ll put my best foot forward --- please tell that to Sion

Ahotaare.”

“..... Ahotaare, hm. Well, I’ll tell that to him. So, where do you want me to send you the reply? It’s not like it’s guaranteed that things will go according to your plan yet..... well then again, you did say you will be near the borders of Runa. Then, I’ll send it there.”

Ryner nodded.

“Thanks.”

“Ahh. Well, I’ll get going. You guys should disappear as well. If not, I’ll bring some men here with me later.”

“Ehhh ~, you still have energy to fight?”

As Ryner said that in a weary voice, a smile floated on Claugh’s face.

“Well, I wasn’t being serious earlier.”

“You’re joking again.”

“Well, whether it’s a joke or not, you’ll find out the next time we meet on the battlefield.”

After saying that, with Shuss slung over his shoulder, Claugh left.

After seeing his figure disappearing into the darkness of the forest, Ryner murmured softly,

“..... in the end, wherever I go, he would be an enemy.....”

Following that, he turned to face the beauty beside him.

As usual, while munching away on her dango, she was looking in Ryner’s direction as if she was watching somebody

else carrying out a conversation.

“Hn. Is it finished?”

“It’s finished.”

“Well well, did it go well?”

“Uh~n. I wonder. I can’t really say for sure until the outcome is clear..... But, it probably went forward in a good direction, I guess.”

As he said that, she nodded, but for some reason, she made a complicated expression,

“But don’t let your guard down, Ryner. At any rate, this plan was concocted by the number one blockhead of the blockhead industry, Ryner Blockhead. In the end, *Aahh, as I thought, I’m a blockhead wah* ~, that kind of development.....”

But, for some reason, at that moment, she stopped and once again put her dango into her mouth and started munching,

“Aahh, as I thought, dango is delicious.”

“Duh, why did you stop in the middle?”

“I got sick of it in the middle.”

“I couldn’t agree more.”

“Yeah.”

As they were carrying out their meaningless talk, they started moving.

Towards north-northeast.

So as to speak, they had to move real quick. The reason was because, Ryner had yet to meet Toale.

In the conversation with Claugh earlier, it seemed like Ryner had already linked up with Toale, and it was Ryner who had given the order to the ten thousand soldiers to move close to the Runa border, however, the truth was that he had yet to meet Toale.

On top of that, Ryner had not yet told Toale of his plan.

Well, how Toale and his ten thousand soldiers had escaped detection from Claugh and Roland's army was thanks to a capable comrade of Ryner.

Ryner's comrade had went on ahead to persuade Toale to move his troops, but the actions to be taken from here on were not something that his comrade could talk Toale into single-handedly.

That's why they had to hurry, and Ryner descended from the tree branch.

And then,

"..... Kiefer, will she be ok?"

He said, and following that, Ferris who also got down,

"That cutesy girl will probably do fine. She seems to be good with men."

She said.

And Ryner started,

"Cutesy girl....."

"Huh? What?"

“No, nothing..... erm, ahh, well, nevermind.....”

He took in a breath.

Currently, the comrades Ryner had brought along were Ferris, Kiefer, and Iris, and among the three of them, *Ferris and Kiefer, well, to say they are not on good terms, or to say they are on good terms, that's kind offff*.

“..... I’m not going to think about it anymore.....”

Ryner said in a tired voice, and Ferris turned to face him,

“What are you mumbling about?”

“Nothing nothing.”

“Are you hiding something from me!?”

“No, it’s not something that needs to be hidden.....”

But, as usual, Ferris, without listening to Ryner,

“Noooooooooooooooooooooo! A hentai, while hiding something perverted, is running about naked in the forestttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt!”

She started yelling.

Ryner, with a weary face,

“..... I’ve always wonder about that, is it fun?”

On hearing that, she nodded in an exaggerated manner,

“Yup!”

In response to that, Ryner also nodded,

“I see..... if it’s fun, well, I’ll leave it at that.”

As he said that, their pace quickened.

Their destination was the border dividing Nelpha and Runa.

Heading towards Toale, the single man who had taken ten thousand soldiers under him, and to go give Kiefer a hand.

Chapter 2 - The Burden He Shoulders

“Why are Ryner and Ferris-san together, and I’m aloneeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!”

Suppressing her heated emotions, Kiefer Knolles walked alone.

With shoulder length red hair, and strong, dignified red eyes.

With a girlish body, feeling a little uncertain to be travelling alone as a girl, having a lovely appearance, and on top of that, wearing a one-piece dress that has a short skirt length.

The truth is, it would have been more convenient for her to wear the light armor made for travelling, but right now, there was no way she would wear that useful armor.

The reason was because, the strongest and worst love rival, peerless beauty Ferris Eris, for some reason, was wearing a one-piece dress for travelling!

For a girl with such an expressionless face!

For a girl who has no interest in fashion at all!

Wearing such a cute one-piece dress!

And if.

And if I don't wear a few one-piece dresses as well, and because of that,

(Ah-reh, Kiefer doesn't look very womanly, not cute at all)

Ryner might mock me privately like that, and that is something I don't want happening, geez,

"Idiot!"

Kiefer let out a soft incomprehensible holler.

By the way, currently, Kiefer was on a wilderness trail a short distance away from the highway of Nelpha.

She had heard from the villagers whom she had dropped by en route to here that there were bandits in the vicinity,

"Hey, hey Miss, if a girl like you wears such 'flashy' clothes, you will get abducted for sure! Even if not so, for a cute girl like you, it's better to be more careful you know!"

The part on *"even if not so, for a cute girl like you"*, however much she wanted Ryner to hear that,

"Why is Ryner never by my side during crucial times like this!"

She ranted loudly all by herself.

And when Kiefer was done with her rants after some time,

"Wait, this isn't the time for this....."

She retorted at herself.

During these few years.

While Kiefer was travelling alone in search of a way to nullify Ryner's **Alpha Stigma** with the hope of saving him, she had acquired a bunch 'self-conversing' techniques to pass the time.

On this day as well, after leaving the village, getting off the highway and while walking along the wilderness trail, she had been talking to herself and fantasizing all this time, and consequently, she did not feel any boredom in the slightest.

"Wait, isn't it a little sad that I've gotten used to talking to myself?"

She muttered and followed that with a chuckle.

And then, she looked up at the clear sky.

"....."

Since morning, the weather had been good, giving off a comfortable air that made her wonder whether the current dark situation in Nelpha was really happening.

But the truth was things had become rather serious. It appeared that the chaos of the war was about to sweep across the country.

During her travels these past few years, she had witnessed such landscapes numerous times.

Attacked by neighboring countries, the people who had neither power, money, nor information to aid them in escaping got swallowed up the ambitions of other countries.

The ordinary people who knew nothing, were the ones who

got sacrificed first.

Even the villagers at the village which Kiefer had made a pit stop at earlier seemed ignorant of when the Roland army would reach this vicinity and turn it into a battlefield, but yet, the only thing they were worried about was Kiefer travelling in a one-piece dress by herself.

No, most of the people who could escape had already escaped northwards. The only ones left were those elderly who did not have the strength to run, and they had clearly already given up and continued living here calmly.

"....."

Thinking of those calm faces made Kiefer feel like crying.

Wars had always been like this, she thought.

As always, there was no salvation anywhere.

Only destruction and despair.

It was the same during the time when Kiefer's sisters got killed.

And there was nothing she could do to change that. No, rather, she had also never have thought about doing something about it.

War is always cruel, but, it'll be fine as long as the people precious to her did not get caught in it, she would only think.

"..... in the end, everyone died....."

She murmured with a sad looking face.

But, this time, it was different.

Her journey this time was different.

The thing she was going to accomplish this time through her journey, was to stop this unproductive war.

It was a plan thought out by Ryner.

It was a plan thought out after much mulling by Ryner, who was always so kind, and always only thinking about sacrificing himself to save everyone.

It was a wonderful plan.

And the most important part of it was entrusted to Kiefer.

And that gave her a little sense of pride.

"....."

And at that moment, she recalled the words of Ryner.

"Kiefer, I'm leaving the most important part to you though, but, I think you are the only one who can pull it off. That's why, I'm entrusting it to you."

He had said.

You are the only one who can pull it off. That's why, I'm entrusting it to you.

That was what Ryner had said.

He had said it with a serious face.

She recalled that moment when Ryner had entrusted this to her, believing in her.

After having betrayed everyone again and again, when she recalled the moment when Ryner had entrusted this to her,

believing in her,

"..... uwufufu."

She laughed again, all by herself.

Despite the fact that her being all alone had bothered her when she thought about it, since this made her happy, it couldn't be helped, she thought.

That's why, even when she should be traveling alone enthusiastically, whenever she thought about the fact that the beauty Ferris-san was by the side of Ryner, *uwuuu* ~, she would get depressed, but whenever she thought about how Ryner was believing in her, depending on her, *uwufufu* ~, she would cheer up again; anyway she was a solitary busy woman right now.

"But, well."

She looked at her surroundings.

She then spread the map of Nelpha in her mind.

Entered into her head was most of the map, starting from Roland then northwards, past Imperial Nelpha and the Autonomous Holy City of Cassla, and even further past the central continent, up till the northern continent all the way to Gastark.

She was generally aware of the situations of roughly each and every country.

While she had accumulated all this knowledge after three years of traveling, she had never thought that this would be something useful to Ryner, but somehow, it was currently the most useful thing to him.

Kiefer looked in front of her.

A hill that was as small as her left hand was ahead of her, and beyond that would be a river.

But, further up the river, it opens up into a plain, and if Toale Nelphi's ten thousand troops were to hide themselves from the army of Roland, and prepare themselves from surrounding attacks, they might be lurking on the side of the woods there were beyond the plain, and with that supposition, Kiefer had come all the way till here.

Then.

"..... seems like my guess was right."

She looked at the ground.

On the ground were almost faded traces of campfires. If there were bandits, they would not bother erasing the traces of the fires they built. Then, who was responsible for all these?

"....."

Kiefer crouched down and touched the remnants. She brushed off the ashes, attempting to find out how long ago were the fires extinguished.

This was probably the work of scouts sent by Toale to find out the place where Roland's army was concentrated at, she thought.

Maybe Kiefer and them had just passed each other.

If that's the case, then it might be faster if Kiefer were to just go after the scouts and ask them the location of Toale.

"....."

At that moment, Ryner's face surfaced in her mind again.

His rare serious, drawn face.

"Before you manage to meet up with Toale directly, avoid contact with any contact with Nelpha soldiers alright? Toale isn't the type of person who will do anything to a woman without first listening to her, but with regards to the soldiers of Nelpha, due to the hostility posed by Roland's army, they might act violently, and attack you without listening to your story, thinking that you might be a spy, so you must move cautiously."

He had said.

And Kiefer had laughed at that.

"Oh, Ryner, so you're worried about me?"

On hearing that, he had made a strange face,

"That's natural right. I'm sending you alone into the enemy's base. There's no way I won't be worried. Kiefer, please be careful no matter what."

He had said.

Upon thinking about that.

"....."

Kiefer's face softened again.

However, she was also aware of how dangerous this mission was.

In this current situation, it was certain that the Nelpha soldiers would act hostilely against others. And they were not limited to outsiders, but included past comrades of the this very country

as well.

The truth was, Prince Starnel had made use of these ten thousand troops to cover his escape, abandoning them. Before Toale appeared to lead them, the abandoned troops must have felt disheartened, she thought.

That's why, right now, this place was unbelievably dangerous.

But of course, compared to the plan that Ryner was executing now, which was to beat down the number one monster of Roland's forces --- Crimson Finger Claugh Klom, and use him as bargaining chip, this was nothing.

"But, my success or failure will also determine the fate of Ryner, so I have to give it my best....."

And she started walking again.

Paying heed to her surroundings, she erased her tracks so as not to set up an unfortunate encounter with the scouts of Nelpha while she advanced forward.

This was a specialty of hers.

Traveling alone, infiltrating other countries.

Alright, she shall do her job properly this time as well,

"In order to get praised by Ryner."

She murmured and at that moment.

"....."

A faint sound riding on the wind reached her ear.

Instantly.

She lowered her body.

It was really a faint sound that could be attributed to mishearing, but still, she tensed herself up and lowered her body.

While crouching down, she moved to a place where grass grew, hid herself there, and erased her presence. She listened intently.

However.

"....."

She could no longer hear anything. The only thing she could hear were the sounds of the grass rustling in the wind. Perhaps, she really had misheard.

But still, even so,

"....."

She kept still.

Her sixth sense, that had protected her all this while she journeyed alone, told her not to move.

Something was there.

She could feel it.

No, even if there wasn't, there wasn't a need for her to move for a while. If there wasn't, then so be it.

However, the problem would arise if there was something there and she were to let her guard down and move. That would be fatal.

Compared to Ryner and Ferris, she was not that strong. Even though she could take care of one or two soldiers who have not received a lot of training, but she could not afford to let her guard down just because of that.

She might just die if she even let her guard down one bit.

"....."

That's why she continued to conceal her presence.

At that moment, she could once again catch hold of a faraway sound riding on the wind.

".....ig.....re."

This time round, she was certain of it.

It was the voice of a person.

And it was coming closer towards here.

This time round, she was pressed to make another choice. Whether to ascertain who was heading here or not.

Now, which one should she choose?

"....."

Kiefer considered as she held her breath.

In the meantime, the owner of the voice was getting closer. From the sounds, she could tell the number of people.

The hooves of horses.

Three of them.

From the sounds of the hooves, they were moving fast.

Seems like they are in a hurry.

From their hurried motion, the possibility of them being scouts is high, Kiefer thought.

"..... now, what should I do?"

Hidden in the grass, she peered through the gaps with her red eyes.

She could see the sand stir up from the south.

The sand stirred up by the horses.

Three horses galloping towards here.

However.

However, the people riding on the three horses were clearly strange.

"....."

Without thinking, Kiefer almost cried out in surprise. With her eyes widening, *what's that!* She withheld her impulse to almost cry out.

But, the scene that was unfolding before her was clearly a strange one.

There were three horses that were galloping at an extremely fast pace, but yet, only the one at the center was ridden by people.

And for some reason, that horse at the center was ridden by three people.

On top of that,

"Yahorh!!"

The one who was sitting right in front, leading the three horses and shouting loudly, was but, a ten year old, no matter how one looks at it, a bishoujo with golden hair and blue eyes.

On seeing that, Kiefer stood up.

"I-Iris-chan! You can't be so loud here!"

It was hard to tell whether she had said that in a loud or soft voice.

Following that, Iris turned.

Looking at Kiefer with a happy face, she waved without thinking,

"Wah Kiefer-neechan, here we are!!"

"Dduh, as I was saying, hush! Hush!"

She put a finger to her lip, gesturing to Iris to keep quiet.

In response to that,

"Hush?"

Iris raised a finger.

"Hush hush."

And then, on top of making a 'V' sign, she said,

"Yay!"

"Dang, nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

Somehow, the stupid thing that it had become made Kiefer

flare up in anger without thinking.

As the horses reached her, Iris called them to a halt, and dismounted,

"Eh? Eh? What's wrong?"

On hearing that, Kiefer could only smile.

She let her tension leave her body and patted Iris's head,

"Nothing. It's ok. But, Iris-chan, you did manage to come from Roland safely huh."

Iris then made a triumphant face,

"I came back!"

She acknowledged loudly.

With golden hair resembling that of her big sister Ferris, and with her big, round, blue eyes, it seems like she will grow up to become an incredible beautiful woman.

She was wearing a dress with a lot of frills, and carrying a large backpack behind her, like always.

However, for a small girl like her, she was given an extremely mission this time.

That's how few comrades Ryner has beside him, to the point that even a girl like her need to do her best.

"....."

They have to fix this, Kiefer thought. It would be quite tough to go up against the Hero King Sion Astal. Of course they were not considering about waging a war against him or anything of that sort, but still, they should try to gather a few more allies

as soon as they can, she thought.

If Ryner is already determined to carry this forward, then the sooner they do that the better.

Well, this might be too premature to think about now.

In any case, the girl right before her, Iris Eris, little sister of Ferris, was given an important mission just like Kiefer.

That was.

"....."

Kiefer then looked at the two horses which were riderless.

Strapped onto their backs, were backpacks which were similar in shape as the one carried by Iris, but much larger in size.

Looking at that, she asked.

"So, inside those packs."

Iris nodded.

"Yep, I've brought the flags. Roland's flag flag ~!"

Following that, she pointed to the pack behind her,

"But, this one right here is Onee-sama's dango dango ~"

She said.

Well, who cares about the dango, but with regards to Roland's flags, it's an indispensable item for them to carry out their strategy.

Nelpha troops carrying Roland's flags and attacking Runa.

Of course, it will be best if it doesn't come to that, but in truth, faced with that possible threat, it's necessary to hoist those flags.

That's why, with a slightly serious face, Kiefer approached the horses. Following that, she opened up the backpacks and ascertained the contents.

Inside it, were a few flags which had the symbolization of Roland, a spear with a snake twirling around it, drawn on them.

"Orh ~, Iris-chan, this is perfect!"

She smiled gently and turned around.

Iris then raised both her hands,

"Iris is a perfect kid!"

She said happily.

And that was one of the missions that Iris had to accomplish.

On top of that, there was one more mission that Iris was entrusted with.

"....."

Just by looking at the faces of the pair of young man and girl, she knew that Iris had completed all her missions properly.

She had managed to safely bring along two more of Ryner's comrades from Roland.

Well, even though she had called them comrades, they were merely seven, eight year old kids.

She looked at the pair on the horse, a cute-looking girl with

light brown hair looking a little unsettled, and behind her, holding her as if he was protecting her, a black hair, chivalrous-looking young man who had an air which somewhat resembled that of Ryner around him.

Just by one look, she knew that these were the two who Ryner had left behind in Roland.

Previously captured by the Nelpha military[3] and tortured, **Alpha Stigma** bearer Arua, and his childhood friend, Kuku.

Arua looked at Kiefer and said.

"..... then you must be Kiefer-san right?"

He used a polite manner of speech unthinkable for a child. While, from the messy black hair and black eyes of an **Alpha Stigma** bearer, she could feel that there's some resemblance to Ryner, Arua's mannerisms also gave the impression of him as an orderly and disciplined person.

His movements, very much un-childlike, also had no openings.

Showing traces that he had clearly undergone some sort of training. According to Ryner, after he had brought them out of Nelpha, they had been putting up at the famous swordsclan house, with the Eris family, and Arua had probably received some training there.

But even so, it was strange for a seven-eight year old boy like him to be that calm. It was as if he had seen through various things in life from his gruesome past.

"....."

Kiefer's face contorted in sadness for a moment. But immediately after, she shook her head and adopted a gentle

smile, and then said.

"Sorry for not introducing myself earlier. I'm Kiefer Knolles. I've been traveling around various countries, and finally ended up as Ryner's comrade. And so, you are....."

Upon her saying that, Arua puffed his chest out and said,

"I'm the disciple of Ryner-sensei."

Disciple --- when Arua said that, he had a sense of pride in his tone, *oh, Ryner I say, you are loved even by children huh*, Kiefer became a little happy.

Following that, Kuku who was in front of him said,

"I'm Kuku, the fiancee of Arua!"

Instantly.

Arua's face turned red suddenly.

"Eh? Wait, fiancee!? Hey, Kuku, erm....."

"Eh? I'm wrong?"

"No, that aside, we're not even ten yet....."

"Eeeeeeeehhhhh? Then, then, when we were leaving Roland, when you said that you're going to protect me for life, was that a lie?"

"No, it's not."

"Then we're engaged right!"

"Really?"

"Of course! You did say for life right? When you say for life, it

means forever right?"

"Yeah but."

"Then we'll have to get married right!"

"Really?"

"Of course! So in other words, I'm Kuku, Arua's fiancee. Pleased to meet you, Kiefer-neesama!"

She said cheerfully.

On hearing that,

"Uwu ~?"

His face turned red.

That face was different from the earlier feeling it gave off, no matter how dark Arua's past was, right, he's smiling right from the bottom of his heart; Kiefer could see that, and she smiled.

Then, she thought.

Just like the time when Ryner saved Kiefer, he had saved Arua, she thought.

Around the world, there are other **Alpha Stigma** bearers, but most of them have a sad face of misfortune and will eventually die in the end.

Kiefer had witnessed those sad faces a number of times.

But Arua was different from them.

Having been blessed with a bothersome-looking sleepy-head teacher like Ryner, right now, he was really smiling cheerfully.

Just by seeing that, Kiefer knew that what they were about to do was the right thing to do.

What Ryner wanted to accomplish was the right thing to do, Kiefer thought.

Because he was always trying to save someone.

And right now, Ryner was attempting to save a comrade who was crying in anguish.

He was trying to save his best friend whom he had walked with all this while.

He was trying to save Sion Astal.

What will happen in the end?

"....."

Kiefer didn't know.

When Kiefer left Gastark Empire, the king of Gastark, Refal Edia had told her this.

"I'd like you to go save Ryner from the monster of the south --- Sion Astal."

I'd like you to save Ryner from getting devoured by Sion.

If you don't, the foolish, sad, ***Lonesome Demon*** *will gladly let himself get devoured by the* ***Mad Dark Hero****.*

Refal had said that.

He had said that he would like her to prevent that.

The fairy tale which had repeated itself again and again, told to her by Refal, was too large a scale for her to comprehend, but yet, somehow, she understood.

The Lonesome Demon who thinks about his friend.

The **Alpha Stigma** bearer who's too kind and too sad.

That kindness of Ryner will get betrayed.

But still, even so, Kiefer couldn't tell Ryner to abandon his friend.

Since I.

"....."

Since I love that part, that kindness of Ryner.

That's why, she would be putting her faith in Ryner, and try saving him. As to what will happen in the end, she did not know.

With the hope of saving Sion, and the desire to rescue Ryner, she will try moving forward, she thought.

And after that, if something that will cause Ryner to weep happens, even if she needs to sacrifice herself, she will save him, that's what she has decided. Even if she has to beat Ryner up, and get hated by him, she will take him to Gastark and save him, that's what she has decided.

But, until then.

Until she has seen it through to the end, she decided that she will devote herself to his cause wholeheartedly. She decided that she will save him from his destiny.

And in order to do that, the plan for the upcoming event must

succeed.

Kiefer said.

"Well, now that we're done with the introductions, let's get going. It'll be dangerous if we tarry around here for too long."

On hearing that, Arua nodded and looked around him,

"..... Toale-sama's troops are probably hiding somewhere ahead."

He said.

In response to that, Kiefer nodded as well.

"Oh, as expected from someone born to Nelpha. I'm also of the same opinion. In terms of terrain, what's ahead of here would be the best."

"Yeah. But, since it's too much of a best place, Roland's troops will probably find them soon. We need to quickly get to the place that Ryner-sensei wants us to move to, but..... if the four of us move together, it may not be such a good thing. More importantly, it'll be dangerous if we get into contact with Nelpha troops with the Roland flags that we are carrying. That's why we should split up into two groups here. Iris-neesama, Kuku, and I should first proceed to near the Runa borders."

What he said was exactly the same idea that had unfolded in Kiefer's head.

This child is really sharp like his teacher.

Kiefer smiled and looked in the direction of Kuku.

"What an awesome fiance, isn't he?"

She said and *yeah!*, Kuku nodded.

Arua's face turned red again.

For some reason, Iris was eating dango while standing on one of her hands.

"....."

Hey, isn't this girl already ten plus years old, then why is she acting so childishly.....

As Kiefer pondered about that, she remembered the cute mannerism of Ferris, who is around her own age, and perhaps this girl is just like her big sister, she thought.

Just when she was thinking about how adorable those two are, once again, *uwuu, Ryner you idiot, are you already head over heels in love with Ferris-san huhhhhhhhhhhhh?*, she thought but now's not the time, let's get moving, and so Kiefer also has her own troubles brewing.

For a few seconds, those complicated thoughts ran amok in Kiefer.

"Now."

She said.

Once again, she looked towards the north.

A hill that was as small as her left hand was ahead of her, and beyond that would be a river. And upstream along that river, was a plain, and beyond that a forest, and past that, would probably be the place where Toale's ten thousand army was encamped at.

If she is to ride that distance, it will probably take less than two days.

In order not to get discovered, she had been slowly searching for the place where Toale's troops were, but right now, she already had a clear idea of where that was, so it would be better if she just head straight there by horse.

Of course, if she rides, it'll increases the danger of her getting discovered, but, the appointed time with Ryner was getting closer.

The appointed time to move nearer to Runa's borders and link up with Ryner. And there was not much time left to that appointed time.

At that moment, Arua dismounted and so did Kuku.

Then.

"Please use this horse. We'll bring the flags and proceed ahead to Runa's borders first."

Kiefer nodded.

Following that, she mounted the horse. She patted its head and turned around,

"Well then, Arua-kun. Take care of Kuku-chan and Iris-chan."

Upon saying that, Arua suddenly had a bewildered expression,

"Eh, erm but, Iris-neesama is much stronger than me....."

But, at that moment, Iris, who was still standing upside down said,

"Arua Arua!"

"Yes?"

"Please take care of me!"

She shouted cheerfully as if she had understood nothing, and in response to that, Arua looked troubled,

"..... y-yeah. I'll do my best."

He nodded.

Kiefer smiled, and with that,

"Alright, everyone, take care."

She said and started her horse forward.

The scenery started to flow.

The destination was getting closer.

A mission to persuade the Toale Nelphi she had yet to meet, and the abandoned ten thousand soldiers, and to coax them into becoming their allies.

A dangerous mission which could get her killed if she did it

badly.

But.

"....."

But, Kiefer merely smiled at that thought.

And while facing straight ahead,

"..... this is something I'm good at."

She murmured softly.

The location shifts to somewhere further north.

Somewhere off the midstream of the Grydl River, inside a small tent erected in a clearing.

"But, no matter how many times I've worn this, it still feels tight."

Toale Nelphi said as he loosened the neck of the military uniform he was wearing.

With brown hair and gentle eyes. However, embedded deep within those eyes, a single-mindedness, air of nobility could be seen.

Nineteen years old.

Being born of the current king of Imperial Nelpha, Starnel Nelphi and his mistress, he was abandoned because of his

commoner blood, and while living in an ordinary town while his half brothers and sisters were raised within the royal compounds, he was not involved in politics nor given any authority.

"....."

However, right now, he was followed by ten thousand soldiers, as well as over two thousand commoners who had joined up by themselves, and made the king of people.

"..... they've gotten me."

Toale murmured.

He stood up, and exited the tent.

Outside, filled to the point where he could hardly see anything else, were people, people, people.

Mixed in the group of people who were wearing the military uniform of Nelpha, were men, women, elderly, and children.

The children who saw Toale come out of the tent shouted,

"It's Toale-sama!"

Then, all the rest looked at him and waved.

There were also those who lowered their heads.

There were also those who prostrated.

On seeing that, more from just the tightness of his uniform, it became harder to breathe.

However, he couldn't show that on his face. The people who were gathered here were more unsettled than Toale himself.

That's why he smiled and waved his hand. As he did that, the soldiers and people started cheering. He then nodded with a confident expression on his face and murmured,

"..... this shouldn't be happening."

In response, from behind him,

"This is all because of Toale-sama's benevolence."

Said a familiar face, the master of the library that Toale had always hung out at, Gainel.

Toale grimaced and turned around.

"That'll be troubling, Gainel-jiisan. In the first place, I didn't want you to be following me here as well. To put it frankly, this is a journey of suicide you know?"

He said.

That was the truth.

He had desperately come all the way here to save the ten thousand troops that were thrown away by Prince Starnel as sacrificial pawns from getting crushed by Roland's forces, but for some reason,

"Finally, our star, the true ruler, Toale Nelphi, has decided to rise up!"

"Everyone, follow Toale Nelphi-sama!"

Incomprehensible things like that happened and after this and that, he was set up as king.

And right now, the soldiers and people who were here were filled with hope on their faces.

Even though it should be a situation that was hopeless beyond hopelessness, but yet, everyone was making a face as if they had found a beacon of light.

"....."

However, in response to that, Toale sighed.

The reason was because this light wouldn't continue for sure.

The life of their beacon of light that they had put up, Toale, would not remain for long.

Right now, the overwhelming large forces of Roland Empire were heading northwards. They were so mighty that the entire Imperial Nelpha had been sent into a panic.

And his father had gone nuts. Without consideration for the people, he took his troops, plundered the people and escaped.

However, that act itself was meaningless.

Roland will probably crush the whole of Nelpha.

When that happens, where in the world will Starnel run to?

Runa?

It can't be.

There was no way Runa, as Roland's ally, will accept him.

Then, to Cassla in the north?

That's also impossible.

There was no way he can enter with seventy thousand soldiers. Bring soldiers across the borders. That means war.

On top of that, Starnel had massacred his own people and plundered them. Cassla will definitely not accept such a fella.

Then, what's left?

"....."

There is only one answer.

Imperial Nelpha will disappear. The humongous Roland Empire will oppress Nelpha and take her lands.

If you're weak, you lose.

That was a natural result and his grandpa --- the wise king Gread Nelphi was fully aware of that.

That's why he wanted to surrender.

His grandpa had thought of how to minimize the sacrifices and move forward to the best conclusion.

"....."

But, in the end, things had taken a turn for the worse.

However, Toale wanted to resume those plans.

He wanted to resume his grandpa's plans. That was his duty, the duty of a person who is connected to the royal blood, he thought.

That's why he rose up.

And the first thing he had to do was to save the sacrificial ten thousand soldiers, and following that, send Roland a letter telling them of his intention to surrender.

But, in order to do that, he must not resist the Roland's forces,

and it was necessary to display his intention strongly.

That he was different from Starnel and won't go crazy. That he had no intention of going against Roland. That's why, *In exchange for my life, can you please stop the war? In exchange for my life, can you please let the ten thousand soldiers and the people of Nelpha off?*

He had to proclaim that.

And from his proclamation, a percentage of the seventy thousand soldiers who were following Starnel will probably surrender as well, and that should reduce the number of meaningless killings.

Of course, the remaining soldiers who choose to stay on with Starnel will probably get decimated by Roland in the end, but this should already be the most ideal way to minimize the number of sacrifices.

That's why, this was definitely a suicidal journey.

A suicidal journey where salvation will start with Toale's execution.

However, in reality, things were starting to get worse.

Once the rumor that Toale had taken command of the ten thousand troops had spread, people who declared their intention to follow him appeared one after another. Not just the commoners. Even the bandits operating in this area were now in his camp.

On top of that, there were several nobles who had served under Gread Nelphi who had made the declaration as well. As well as soldiers who should have been following Starnel.

Right now, his location had yet to be found out by the people

of Nelpha, so not that many were gathered yet, but in due time, this place would be found out.

Toale, who was going to give up his life, might end up having tens of thousands of people assembled under him.

This state of events can really be described as the worst possible situation.

With this, even if Toale were to proclaim that he has no intention of fighting, Roland will not believe him.

If such a thing were to come to pass, then the whole country will be plunged into war.

And it will be a war where they have no chance of winning, an all-out war that will only increase the number of sacrifices.

"..... this is troubling."

On hearing Toale's words, Gainel's confident, bearded face became agitated,

"Not at all. With this tide, Toale-sama shall become the king of Nelpha!"

He said.

"The people are the allies of Toale-sama."

He said.

"....."

Toale became gloomy on hearing that.

What is the king of Nelpha?

This king is going to die soon!

He wanted to cry out.

However, instead, with his troubled face,

"..... even so, I can't do a thing like abandoning everyone."

Upon saying that, he looked around him. He looked at the faces of the commoners and the ten thousand soldiers who had assembled for his sake.

Everyone was smiling at him.

But the scene of everyone smiling happily was the most awful scene to Toale.

The refugees who were abandoned by Nelpha and had been driven off their lands by Roland numbered more than thirty thousand.

The matter on giving out rations and feeding this large number of people was a serious problem.

From hereon, if they don't resort to plundering, it will be impossible to sustain them.

But if he were to do that, then he will be the same as his father --- Starnel.

But if he doesn't do that, then over thirty thousand people will not even last two months and starve to death.

Now.

".....now..... what should I do about this?"

As he muttered with a serious expression on his face, he looked intently at the crowd of people who had assembled for his sake.

The solemn faces of the soldiers.

The still lean, and hesitant faces of the soldiers.

The boys who were running around.

The elderly and the woman who were chasing after them.

And from behind all that, from behind the waves of people, the face of a woman poked out. And she looked at him.

She stared straight at him.

"....."

Toale noticed her.

A pair of charming, red eyes looking straight at him. With red hair reaching her shoulders. A beautiful girl, Toale thought. Her age was probably the same as his own right?

While the somewhat cute looking girl looked straight at him,

"..... you are Toale?"

She said.

As Toale nodded to that, she broke into a cheerful smile. That smiling face disappeared from his view for an instant. She was making her way forward,

"Orhh ~. Somehow, with the large number of children and women, it was easy to infiltrate into here ~"

She said and smiled again. That smiling face was definitely bewitching, a smiling face that seemed to bring happiness to those around her --- but, Toale's expression hardened.

"....."

The word she just said.

The word 'infiltrate'.

Toale's whole body tensed up.

Just a while ago. He had thought that such a person would come, but it was earlier than he had expected.

An assassin sent by Roland who had viewed Toale, who had attracted a following of people, as a menace.

Or perhaps, an assassin sent by Starnel who saw his son as an obstacle.

Whichever the case, this was no doubt a killer. Since right now, to the factions that were present in Nelpha, Toale was seen as the largest obstacle.

However, right now, Toale could not afford to get himself killed here. Before he could send a surrender proclamation to Roland, he could not afford to be killed.

That's why, he wanted to retreat hurriedly and shout *Guards* while doing so.

But, she was faster than him.

With a smiling, beaming face, she was faster than Toale, and took another step forward,

"Aah, aah, wait a minute, don't run. I'm here to help you guys."

"Liar."

"It's true."

"Then why are you chasing after me?"

"Because you're running away right?"

"I..... I can't afford to be killed here."

"I know. That's why I'm here to help you."

"Don't mess with me. Right now, in this country, the factions who will help me....."

Don't exist at all. Even though he was about to say that, she was faster than him and finished after him.

Staring straight at him with her red eyes.

"It is Ryner, who will be giving you a hand."

Instantly.

Toale's feet stopped, and following that,

"Eh?"

He uttered.

He knew that name. But, the last time he met him was a long time ago. More than a year ago. However, he remembered clearly.

A strange, sleepy-looking man by the name of Ryner Lute.

He and his partner, Ferris Eris, had rescued his little brother from getting assaulted by some hoodlums.

Following that, they became friendly with him, put up at his place for a while, and after that, they had set off on their journey again.

"....."

Toale looked intently at Kiefer. He stared at her in an attempt to read her, and search to see whether anything was hidden behind her smiling face.

Then, her smiling face became a little nervous,

"..... who on earth are you?"

"Orh, finally, you are willing to listen to me?"

"..... who knows. Well, at the very least, I know that you are not an assassin."

If she had wanted to kill Toale, she wouldn't have started a conversation, and would have stealthily come straight for the kill.

If a single woman like her had wanted to infiltrate a camp full of Nelpha soldiers to carry out an assassination, she wouldn't have time to tarry around like that.

However, she had come here to talk to Toale. Then, perhaps, she's here to bring a message?

Or is she a messenger who has come to threaten him, *if you don't submit, we'll kill you*?

Whichever the case,

"..... if you don't have any intention of killing me, I'm willing to listen to you."

She grinned again. That smiling face stole Toale's gaze.

Then, *dangerous*, he thought.

Her charm is dangerous. If she is a spy from another country, she is one capable spy.

That's why Toale tensed up and looked intently at her.

While she continued to smile,

"Ah, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Kiefer. Kiefer Knolles."

"..... hm. So, Kiefer-san, where did you come from?"

Asked Toale.

Rather, Toale did not even know where the man known as Ryner Lute came from, and where he is now.

For some reason, a year ago, he had told him that he was looking up old legends and fairy tails from across the different lands, and had asked to have access to the national library of Nelpha.

And Toale had no clue as to what purpose and intent he had in doing that.

However, right now, the girl before him said that she had come as a messenger from Ryner to help him.

Who in the world are these people?

What do they intend to accomplish?

There's a need to see through all of this, and upon thinking that, Kiefer said.

"Er~m, if you want me to talk about where I came from, where I will be going, and why I've appeared here, it'll be a little too long, so, right now, since we don't really have much time for that, I'll just pass you Ryner's message first."

"Ryner-san's message?"

"Yeah."

"So, what did Ryner-san say?"

Kiefer then looked up at the sky, appearing to recall something, and following that, she looked intently at Toale, and for some reason, while adopting a sleepy, languid, but yet somehow gentle face resembling that of Ryner, she said.

"Orh ~ Toale, long time no see ~. Seems like you're in a pinch huh, even though it's bothersome, I'll help you out. The reason is because we're friends. Ok?"

On hearing those words.

The reason is because we're friends. Ok?

On hearing those light-hearted words.

"..... haha."

Toale couldn't help but laughed.

Following that, he looked intently at Kiefer,

"..... uwah ~, somehow, that's very persuasive."

He said while laughing.

As he did that, she then made a relieved face,

"Ah, this really worked. Ryner, you know, had said that if I told you that, it would work, and I was getting nervous about what if it doesn't work."

"That's certainly quite nerve-wrecking."

"Isn't it? Assuming it might fail, I ended up thinking out seven types of persuasion methods. But, it's great that it worked, so, are you ready to listen to me?"

"Of course. Ah, let's go into the tent."

Toale prompted for Kiefer towards the tent but, she shook her head.

"Unfortunately, we don't have that time. We need to get moving soon."

"Get moving?"

"Yeah. If we stay here, Roland's scouts will find us soon. We have to move."

"But, sooner or later, they will find us right? With this many people moving, there's no way the enemy won't....."

"Ryner has taken care of that. We're going to move to a place where both Nelpha soldiers and Roland soldiers wouldn't get close, allowing us to at least buy some time before getting discovered."

Toale tilted his head.

A place where Nelpha soldiers and Roland soldiers wouldn't get close.

"Where on earth would such a place be?"

A smile surfaced on Kiefer's face at that question. Once again, nervousness was mixed into that smile.

Following that, she pointed to the East with a finger.

"To the borders with Runa Empire."

On hearing those words.

On hearing those words of hers, Toale started to tense up.

Then, he gradually understood roughly what Ryner Lute's plan entailed.

Indeed, if they were to do that.

If they were to do that, there might indeed be a slight chance that they can break free of this worst case scenario.

However, that was way too dangerous.

An overly dangerous gamble.

A gamble that could put the lives of the commoners into danger, a gamble so dangerous that he hesitated.

However, his tension seemed to have reached Kiefer, and her initial smiling face disappeared, replaced by serious expression as she spoke to him.

"..... I can understand your hesitation, but there's no other way that can reduce the number of sac....."

Cutting her off,

"I understand."

Said Toale.

Indeed, it was so.

Right now, even if Toale gets executed, there is still a high chance that Roland won't stop their massacre.

If whatever he did wouldn't help the situation at all, sink or swim, perhaps, it wasn't that bad an idea to ride on Ryner's plan.

That's why Toale looked up and said.

Glaring at Kiefer,

"But, if there's any indication that you are going to betray us....."

Kiefer cut him off again.

"There's no merit for us to betray you."

"But there's no merit in helping us as well right?"

"That's true but..... but, Ryner is idiotically gentle, so he'll help you. Do you believe that? Well, if you don't believe, I will have to unveil those seven types of persuasion patterns."

"....."

On hearing that.

Toale waved his hand as a smile floated on his face.

"No, it's fine. I believe in Ryner-san."

There isn't any other way I can take anyway --- he couldn't say that.

But Kiefer smiled and nodded.

"Well then, I hope you can start moving your soldiers immediately though."

Once again, she looked around her.

"But, the situation's kind of different from what I've thought. I've heard that you have ten thousand troops following you but..... there are clearly more than ten thousand..... and on top of that, more than half are commoners....."

Toale looked around him. He scanned the crowd of

commoners who had come following him.

And then.

"..... if you're telling me that they can't follow along, then, regarding this plan....."

But, immediately, Kiefer said,

"It's fine. Ryner will definitely keep complaining, *what a bother what a bother*, and in the end, he will save each and everyone."

On hearing that, Toale recalled.

He recalled the time when he first met Ryner.

When Toale's little brother and sister were being assaulted by hoodlums, Ryner passed by and while he kept complaining how bothersome things were and how he didn't want to get involved in it, in the end, he still saved them.

"....."

So as to speak, perhaps Ryner is just that kind of person.

While he didn't know what has Ryner become right now, perhaps.

Perhaps, it might be interesting for him to entrust what may be his final suicidal fate to a friend, Toale thought.

"Well then, let's get moving."

After saying that, he turned to face the several commanders of the ten thousand strong army who had been looking at him inquiringly with nervous looks on their faces.

He then nodded,

"Get your butt moving. Get up. Don't move like a slug!"

He started yelling.

After ascertaining their responses, Toale turned to look at Kiefer. She smiled and nodded.

Once again, that smile took his eyes away.

He gazed at those red eyes in which embedded a strong will, but yet in which surfaced a fleeting shade of weakness.

I have never met such a beautiful girl, those words floated in his mind.

At that moment, she returned his gaze with a curious look on her face and said.

"What's wrong?"

"Eh? Ah, no ~..... erm..... I was just thinking it's going to be tough from here."

She then nodded with a straight face.

"Yeah. But, for the sake of the people gathered here, we need to manage somehow."

"Erm, ah ~, yeah."

Toale made an appropriate response and turned his gaze away from Kiefer.

And then, he became exasperated with the strange feelings that had been born inside of him.

Fool, he chided himself.

No matter where I run to, in the end, I'll just get executed,

what the hell am I thinking about?

"..... aah, damn."

He shook his head, and started moving.

He really didn't have time to think about foolish things.

He had to move.

Carrying the lives of tens of thousands of people, he had to move.

He had no time to wrestle with strange feelings.

"Commanders, tell this to Major Selues. Set up a vanguard of five thousand troops and move towards the Runa borders. But, make sure they don't get too close to the Runa borders. Otherwise, we'll end up fighting Runa. And we have to avoid that at all costs. The commoners will follow next, and with the remaining five thousand troops will follow me and we'll erase our traces here and follow along. We'll disappear from here steadily but rapidly. Get it?"

On hearing that, the commanders bowed and left.

After a while, the soldiers started moving. And following that, the commoners also started moving.

With that, the over thirty thousand people led by Toale started moving in masses.

Looking at that,

"..... I pray to God that this decision is a right one....."

He murmured and Kiefer smiled,

"I thought that there're no religious groups in Nelpha?"

She said.

On hearing that, as much as possible, without looking back at her, Toale replied.

"Indeed. That's why I just prayed to the God of Runa. I prayed to that God of the religious country of Runa Empire..... I prayed for the outcome that even as we get close to the borders of Runa, it won't result in a war."

While saying that, he looked to the front of the moving crowd. The commoners were moving at a slow speed. With this pace of movement, it will probably take them three days to reach their destination.

Three days.

"Three days huh..... that's long."

He groaned.

And if they were to be discovered by Roland forces in these three days, everything would come to an end.

And that would be a very tough fight, he thought.

But, even so,

"..... I have to make this work....."

While murmuring that softly, with a bitter face, he looked up to the southern sky above the Roland forces which were making their way northwards here.

♦

♦

He knew that the world was moving.

In a completely different direction than before.

He could hear the sounds of the moving world, giving birth to a completely different scenery.

"....."

In the whirlpool of the sounds, Sion Astal bent over slightly.

With silver air that has an air of nobility, and golden eyes in which a strong determination was embedded.

Those eyes were not now looking at his throne room but at a completely different world.

It was a dark, dark, scenery which was completely dark in its entirety.

Occasionally, a light would be given off but it would disappear immediately. In the overly dark world, the dim light would disappear immediately.

That was the scenery that he was looking at now.

It was a scenery seen by the former hero.

It was a scenery seen by the former demon.

Recently, it has overlapped with the real world.

"..... most terrible."

Muttered Sion.

Most of the madness inside him was about to awaken.

Most of the ecstasy within him could no longer be suppressed.

Change.

Everything will.

Be changed.

The world.

It starts right from here.

The door starts from here.

Looking at that door.

Looking at the door that connects to the darkness on the other side.

What's left is to open the lock of that door with a key.

Key.

Key.

The sacrificial demon.

If Ryner's life becomes mine.....

"....."

And at that moment.

"Your Highness."

He was called.

Sion dispelled the darkness before his eyes. His consciousness returned to reality and he turned his gaze to the front.

A man stood there.

With long beautiful black hair, and frozen, dark, dark blue eyes.

Before him, was Lieutenant General Miran Froaude.

Those dark eyes looked intently at him.

"Your Highness."

Sion answered.

"What is it?"

"..... no, it's because you didn't seem to notice me when I entered the throne room..... are you tired?"

To that question, Sion replied.

"No, no problem at all."

But, Froaude had a worried look, which didn't seem to suit him, on his face,

"Is that so? When I'm not around, it's good to get some sle....."

But, Sion cut him off,

"Did you come here just to talk about that?"

He said.

Froaude stopped his words. With a troubled looking face, he looked intently at Sion,

"No. I have a few reports to make."

"Then speak."

"Yes. Firstly..... regarding the capturing of Ryner Lute....."

But, Sion said instead.

"You want to tell me he escaped? I know that. He went to Nelpha."

Froaude's eyes widened in slight surprise.

"I see. Your Highness is aware of that. Was someone assigned to spy on me....."

But, Sion shook his head.

"No."

"Then, how is it....."

"I'd know if Ryner leaves the country. Since he's the key to open the door. If a thing of necessity disappears from this country, I'd know. Aah, besides that....."

Sion turned to face his back, looking up at the empty space,

"Lucile has also praised you. *He's a wonderful pawn, so treat him well*, he said."

While saying that, he looked at Froaude once more.

A thin smile formed on his deep red lips.

"..... well well, I'm really honored at his praise. Then, I presumed you've heard from him with regards to the matter?"

Froaude said, but the truth was different.

It was really as what Sion had said earlier.

That's the extent to which the **Mad Hero** inside of Sion had started encroaching on him.

He was starting to get dominated by the **Power** inside of him to the effect of attaining awareness of whether the target he wanted to devour was still nearby or not.

Occasionally, his consciousness would get blended in.

Really, by now, he should have already opened the door with the key, and become **True**, but because of the delay, the **Power** has started meandering off into a strange direction.

For some reason, Lucile had said that it was interesting.

Moving forward without devouring Ryner, without repeating that screwed-up past; that is an interesting development, he had said.

"....."

No, now's not the time to think about that.

Sion looked at Froaude.

He was once again looking at him with a worried look on his face.

Sion smiled wryly.

He could tell that he had returned slightly to his former humanity with that wry smile.

"..... no..... aah, I'm sorry, Froaude. I was paying a little too much attention to another place. I haven't slept a lot in this place. Like you said, I'm a little tired."

Froaude nodded and said.

"..... there's still a long way to go. No, it might be more apt to say that your domination journey has just started. You have to take care of your body."

"I understand."

"Perhaps, you'd like to take a little rest?"

"..... you're right. But right now, I can't rest yet. Before that, let's hear about the situation in Nelpha."

"It's going well."

On hearing those words,

"Hah."

Sion laughed.

If it was going well, that means the war should come to an end soon. Nelpha will surrender soon and everything should end smoothly but.

"..... I've heard that Gread Nelphi died."

Sion said, to which Froaude nodded.

"He was killed by his son."

"It couldn't be prevented huh?"

A cynical smile then surfaced on Froaude's face.

"Nelpha's upper echelon was foolish beyond our expectations, it seems....."

"So, it will become an all out war?"

"Yes."

"Is Claugh agreeable?"

"..... no. Field Marshal Claugh has sent another message."

Upon saying that, Froaude handed over a piece of paper that he had held in his hand.

Sion took it and let his gaze fall onto the paper.

It was yet again another message from that fella. From the one who had escaped from this country, Ryner ---

A message from his best friend.

"....."

And in that message, was written a plan which he had come up with, on how to break through this worst case scneario.

"....."

Sion squinted his eyes.

Furthermore, at the end,

"Because Sion Astal is my friend, I won't abandon him, that's the disgusting message that the sleepy-headed man gave, now, what will you do, Sion?"

Such a line was scribbled by Claugh, in his not so beautiful

handwriting.

"....."

Sion looked at that message.

Following that, he looked up at the ceiling once as if to consider the words.

Ryner's plan is a pretty interesting one, Sion thought. It might be interesting to go along with it, he thought.

Ryner has come up with this plan for my sake, isn't it? He thought.

Just as he thought, Ryner had moved to save Roland --- to save Sion, without Nelpha surrendering nor having Roland move backwards to where it has been before, he thought.

Because they are friends.

Because they are best friends.

Even though I have betrayed him in the worst possible way, Ryner still said that.

With his usual kind and sleepy face, he had said that.

"....."

However, in response to that.

Sion crushed the piece of paper in his hand.

And said.

To the man with a devil-like smile before him.

"Froaude."

"Yes."

"What do you think of this message?"

"..... a cowardly prank."

On hearing that,

"That's right."

Said Sion.

"The Roland now is not a country that can stop at this juncture."

He said.

"We have proclaimed that we'll conquer the world. With the least number of sacrifices, in the shortest possible way, in the fastest amount of time, we'll reach the center, central Menoris. For that reason, we need to show our absolute might here. Save the life of Toale Nelphi? To reduce the number of sacrifices, even if it's only a little? Fool. The gears are already spinning. It's no longer possible to stop them. If we don't move forward, the sacrifices will just keep mounting up, more than ever. In the first place, if we stop here, what shall we say to the lives that have already been lost up till this point? What shall we say to the lives that have been lost along our route of advancement? The dice have been cast. The landscape of this world is starting to change. If so, what is it that we must do? What is the best choice we must make?"

On hearing Sion's question, Froaude smiled happily. With a happy, devil-like smile floating on his face,

"..... Your Highness, I understand your feelings. Then, let's kill everyone. In order not to have anyone stand up again. In order not to have anyone want to bare their fangs again."

With that, he turned on his heel. And started walking.

Sion said his leaving back.

"Bring along Bayuuz as well. Take care of everything in a flash."

Without turning around,

"Your wish is my command."

Said Froaude, and he walked out of the throne room.

And once again, the room returned to silence.

Sion was alone again.

Shouldering the quiet world.

Shouldering the lonely world.

Shouldering a world in which he could not even take the hand of his best friend, Ryner, even when he had held it out to save him, a world with so much despair that he wanted to cry.

To that.

"....."

To that, Sion smiled.

A sad smile.

But even so, the gears spun.

But even so, the landscape moved forward.

That's why once again, he closed his eyes quietly.

In order to erase this reality, and turn his consciousness back to the other side.

In order to sink himself into the darkness, to kill each and every of the gloomy **Goddesses**.

Then, at the time when he opened those eyes once more.....

"....."

Chapter 3 - The Burden I Shoulder

The horse galloped.

At full speed.

"My butt huuurrrtttttsssssss!"

While yelling, Ryner rode, he rode, for four days, he rode.

Beside him, Ferris, who had also been galloping for the past four days without sleeping, went,

"..... mumyu ~"

"Hey, don't sleep while ridingggggggggg!"

Ryner yelled at the Ferris who seemed about to slip off her horse.

On hearing that, she opened her eyes suddenly, looked up, and wiped off the little drool from her mouth,

"Hm? What? It's morning?"

"No, it's evening though. Wait, that's not the problem, don't sleep on the horse! It's dangerous."

"I wasn't sleeping."

"I think you were sleeping with half of your body about to fall off."

"I was practicing body-bend riding."

"You're lying!"

"Yeah. A big lie!"

"And you're admitting to it so quickly!"

"Of course. I'm sleepy. And since I'm at my limits, I'm going to nap a little. Let me know when we reach."

"No, I was telling you not to sleep duh."

Ignoring Ryner's holler, she closed her eyes, and with that, she seemed about to slip off the horse again.

"That's why I was saying, don't sleeeppppppppppppppppp!"

Ignoring him, she fell off the horse, and in a splendid manner, she spun a few times in the air and landed on the ground. On top of that, with a soft plod, *good night*, she said and entered the world of dreams.

Following that, the horse which Ferris had been riding on suddenly became energetic due to the lightened load, and whizzed off.

"Jeez, that fella's such a botherrrrrrrrrrrrrr!"

While yelling, he whipped his horse. With that, he caught up to the horse which Ferris had discarded, and grabbed hold of its reins. And pulled. He stopped the horse, turned it around, and returned to the place where Ferris was sleeping.

Then.

"Hey."

"....."

"Hey, we don't really have time to tarry around. We're already one day late from the appointed day that we're supposed to link up with Kiefer."

"....."

"Hey, we only need to ride for another half a day before we reach our destination, so c'mon? Hey? Ferris. Please."

Without looking at him, she said,

"..... shut up. I'm sleepy. I'm sluggish. Bothersome. Go by yourself."

"Hey, are you me! I'm also sleepy to the point of dying, but, if we don't get our act together, Toale's life will be in danger. So let's do our best for a little bit more, ok?"

On hearing that, Ferris finally got up. She looked up at him with a pained expression,

"But Ryner. For the past four days, I haven't eaten a dango

you know? As a person who is a hundred million, two thousand, eight hundred, and ninety-two percent made up of dango, do you think I can continue without any dango?"

At that question, Ryner, with a tired face,

"Wait, so how many percent does your entire body constitute?"

He asked back squarely,

"Who cares about that, just listen to meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

She became really angry.

Ryner smiled wryly and said.

"..... erm, no, well, I know that it's been hard on you to not have eaten any dango for four days, but right now, it's an emergency so bear with it."

"I can't bear with it."

"No, but....."

"I can't bear ---------- it! By the way, there's a nice dango shop nearby."

Upon saying that, she suddenly got up energetically, which was unthinkable for a person who was tired from going without sleep for four whole days.

Looking at that, Ryner exclaimed,

"Huuuuuuuuuuhhhhhhhhhhhh!? Eh? Eh? What's this? Is this that? All that ranting about being sleepy and falling off the horse was an act?"

Ferris promptly replied,

"Of course!"

"Don't 'of course' me!"

"Whatever you think about that is not the main issue here!"

Ferris said vehemently.

"..... hahh."

Ryner sighed out.

Even without that, he was already drained. Having fought with that red-haired monster, getting them horses, and riding crazily without sleep.

Riding crazily without sleep on the horses which he had sneaked out of a noble's stables along the way.

He already felt like dying. Not just from the lack of sleep, but more from the pain in his butt.

Indeed, it seems like they would need some rest soon, but.....

So as to speak, after working so hard till this point, isn't it ok for him to take about two hundred years' worth of afternoon naps right? Isn't it ok for him to just disappear somewhere and take a long afternoon nap right? A temptation like this started to grow in him, but, Ryner stomped it out and said.

"..... b-but you know Ferris. At the appointed place, Iris will be waiting for us with Wynitt dango....."

But Ferris said.

"Nelpha dango and Roland dango are different things altogether."

Her tone became stronger than before,

"..... you're right I guess. Then, erm..... let's take a short break....."

Ryner gave in.

Let's take a short break, Ryner relaxed.

Instantly.

"Woah."

As his strength left him, he almost fell off his horse. Ferris supported him with a hand.

Then.

"See. You're also tired."

"Well..... it's obvious that I'll be tired after riding for four whole days....."

But, he had never thought that he would be so tired. He didn't realize it since he had been keeping his body tensed up all this while, but his body had become abnormally heavy. He immediately understood how it came to be so. It was a consequence of the Estabul magic which he had used to accelerate his movements during his fight with Claugh. That magic, in exchange for granting a period of increased bodily reflexes and ability, will cause the user to feel its weariness later. On top of that, this time round, in order to do something about that red-haired monster, he had seriously overused his body. It was probably the burdens from that which had come to assail him.

However, even those words alone were not enough to convey how heavy his body currently was. Right now, his entire body

was enveloped with a level of fatigue that could make him pass out.

Seeing that, Ferris said.

She looked up at him, and somehow, with a slightly angry face, she averted her eyes and said.

"Jeez..... you've overdone it this time. I understand how you feel, but even so, there's a limit to what one person can do. Don't push yourself too much."

In other words.

"....."

It seems to be that.

It seems like all of Ferris's acting, and her willful behavior of wanting to go to a dango shop, were all for the purpose of saying this.

Aah ~, Ryner thought.

He stroked his disheveled bed-hair,

"Aah ~..... erm, sorry."

"Umu."

"Well then, let's go to that dango shop and rest up in the village."

Ferris then said,

"Idiot. There's no dango shop."

"Eh?"

"That's why you're a real idiot."

Upon saying that, for some reason, her face blushed, and in order to mask that, she made an angry face.

Looking intently at that.

"....."

Looking intently at her face,

"..... aah, I see."

Ryner smiled with a troubled look.

Ferris then jumped onto the horse, the horse that Ryner was now riding. With that, she took the reins away from his hand,

"Alright. If your overly stupid brain has understood, it's time to move. We don't have much time. Once we reach there, there will be work waiting for you again. That's why, the idiot can just sleep. I'll wake you when we reach there."

Upon saying that, she started to kick into the horse.

Ryner then frantically said,

"Eh, but Ferris, you haven't slept a wink as well....."

But at that moment,

"Don't worry about that, just sleep, idiot."

Upon saying that, she made a chopping stance with her hand and started sending it into the back of Ryner's neck,

"Eh, no wait, that's bad....."

"Shut up."

"Gyafu."

Instantly.

Ryner lost consciousness.

Darkness spread.

Deep darkness spread.

In that deep darkness.

Ryner was visited by dreams which had missed him for quite some time.

Strangely, they were cheerful dreams.

Sion appeared, and with a face full of mischief,

"Alright Ryner ~. Nap time's over. It's time to get working."

He said.

For some reason, Ferris, who was munching on dango beside him, drew her sword for no good reason,

"Die, you pervertttttttttttt."

She shouted and came beating him.

That was the scenery that was repeating again and again.

With Sion, and Ferris, the three of them.

A dream in which the three of them were making merry in that small office.

There was nothing to worry about there.

There were no lives nor troubles from others to shoulder.

Only a bunch of fools laughing happily.

And he thought.

It'd be nice if such days can go on forever, he thought.

No, he had believed that it would be so.

Such days would go on, even when he was complaining about how unpleasant or bothersome things were, as long as he worked hard, the world would be alright, he had thought.

That's why he was laughing like that.

He had never thought that it would end.

Laughing like an idiot.

Even when he was made to work throughout the night. Even when he was bashed up by her sword.

Ryner had always been laughing happily.

"....."

And he felt a little blessed.

Even though up till now, he had only been laden with tiresome things.

But, after seeing that dream, he felt like doing his best for a little longer and looking forward.

Since in his dream, he had been laughing like an idiot with them.

He had been laughing like an idiot from the bottom of his heart.

But, the dream came to an end.

Suddenly, it ended, he realized.

No, perhaps he had realized that right from the start of the dream.

That dream.

"....."

Sadly, that dream was nowhere close to reality.

"....."

But, he wished, for a little bit.

Each time he saw that dream, he'd wish.

Ryner would wish that, if only this bothersome reality could be the dream instead when he open his eyes, and that he could wake up to that noisy office, he would be willing to pay any price.

If he were to open his eyes right now.

If he were to awake from his dream.

And the nightmare would have ended and he could wake up to that noisy office again.

He would not make the same mistake again.

He would not leave Sion to his solitude again.

In order to laugh together.

In order to move forward together, this time round, without feeling bothersome, he would do his best, he thought.

And so, Ryner opened his eyes.

Wishing that he could wake up to that office.

"....."

He opened his eyes.....

"....."

When he opened his eyes, they had already reached their destination.

On the land that was very near to the borders between Nelpha and Runa.

There, were gathered tens of thousands of people.

Ryner opened his eyes and straightened his body,

"..... hn? You've awakened?"

From behind him, Ferris, who had been doing the riding, said.

Ryner turned around,

"..... eh? Ah, yeah. I had a good sleep. Thanks, Ferris."

"Umu. I also had a good sleep."

"Hey, what would have happened if you have slept as well."

Upon making that jab, with a slightly tired face,

"Fufufu."

She laughed.

From her face, it was clear that she hadn't really slept at all. Quite unbecoming of her, there were dark circles beneath her eyes. She was clearly very tired. Ryner then began,

"This time, it's your turn to sleep. Leave the rest to....."

But, before he could finish,

"....."

She rested her head on the back of Ryner, and slept.

Ryner smiled, and without letting her body fall off, he supported her with his left hand and once again started the horse galloping.

However, with the throngs of people gathered, they couldn't move very fast.

"....."

He then looked around him.

He looked at the faces of the people gathered here.

Clearly, the people here did not just comprise of soldiers.

Originally, Kiefer was supposed to guide the ten thousand soldiers, who were thrown away as sacrificial pawns by Starnel and later saved by Toale, to this place.

"What on earth is this?"

Ryner said with a troubled face.

Clearly, the commoners who were present here greatly outnumbered the soldiers.

Women, children, as well as the elderly.

A throng of people who couldn't contribute to the fighting strength.

Well, he could probably make a guess as to why they were here.

"..... Toale, that guy sure is popular."

While muttering that, he moved the horse forward.

The people all looked up in a dumbfounded manner at the riders on the advancing horse, at Ryner and the peerless golden hair beauty behind him.

He then asked a question to someone who was clad in military uniform among the people.

"..... ah ~, erm, you are one of the soldiers following Toale

right? I have some business with Toale, so do you mind leading us to him?"

On hearing that, the soldier looked up. And he glared at Ryner.

A man who had a piercing gaze. With long light brown hair tied up at the back, and perhaps, due to his unshaven face, he looked to be in his mid-twenties.

He looked up at them and squinted his eyes.

"..... are you Ryner Lute?"

Ryner was surprised at hearing his own name.

"Oh? To know my name, am I perhaps famous around here?"

On hearing that, the man's face contorted,

"I'm Kazaal Selues. A Major. I was given command of ten thousand troops from Prince Starnel and ordered to fend off Roland's forces, but I went against that and am now following Toale-sama."

On hearing those words, Ryner looked again more carefully at this man called Kazaal Selues.

He was of medium build and medium height. A well-trained body with no opening. He's probably quite strong. Well, of course, he can't be compared to that abnormal killing intent from that red-haired muscled idiot though.

However, just from his appearance, he could tell that this fella has some ability. To elaborate on that, to have become a Major in his twenties, this fella must have achieved a number of accomplishments on the battlefield.

That was the reason why Starnel had assigned ten thousand

troops to him, and abandoned them.

He had probably thought that this fella would be able to fend off the Roland forces for a while and buy him more time to escape.

Considering that.

A smile surfaced on Ryner.

"..... I'm grateful to Starnel's idiocy."

On hearing that, Selues looked at him with a look of surprise,

"What did you say?"

"No, I was just giving thanks to Starnel's idiocy for throwing away someone as capable as you without even batting an eyelid. Thanks to the foolishness of Starnel, the plan I came up with might just go well. By the way, are you popular among your subordinates?"

He asked.

"....."

Selues did not answer. However, even without answering, it was clear.

Ryner looked around him once more.

The soldiers around him all had brightly lit faces. There was not the slightest drop in morale.

After getting abandoned by Starnel, and on top of that having Roland's soldiers on their heels, their current brightly lit faces could not just be attributed to Toale's popularity alone.

Ryner's grin broadened increasingly.

"Unexpectedly, things may just move ahead even without us doing anything."

Toale is popular with the commoners. If both Starnel and Toale were to claim their names to the throne, most of the people would probably follow Toale.

However, this Selues appeared to be very popular with the soldiers.

With this, if Starnel was to continue with his oppression, he would probably end up destroying himself.

If Toale were to rise up, supported by Selues at his side, there was a possibility that the rest of the power-wielding nobles, soldiers, and people would follow him.

If that were to happen.

"....."

Starnel's life would probably be no more. Even without Ryner, Toale, or Roland doing anything.

Thanks to his own foolishness, Starnel would be killed by Imperial Nelpha.

If that were to happen, then there would be no need for Ryner to take the trouble to capture Starnel.

However, the real problem will start from there.

After Starnel's death.

After Toale becomes king.

At that time, Roland will probably be asking for Toale's life.

The current Roland will definitely not allow Toale to live.

That's why in order for Toale to live, there are two choices.

First.

Escape to outside of the country.

Second.

Lead Nelpha's soldiers to fight Roland.

"....."

But the latter was out of the question.

Right now, there was no longer any country in the southern part of the continent with enough power to fight the military might of Roland.

Ryner was very well aware of that.

For the past one year, he had always hung around Sion's side.

Working hard together in that office to strengthen Roland.

And in just one year, Roland was totally transformed to something different from before.

Roland was reborn.

Even though Ryner was not directly involved in the military affairs, he could still imagine roughly how much power the current Roland wielded.

To the Nelpha right now, it would be like hitting a rock with an egg.

Well, however, if they were to ally with Runa Empire to resist Roland, then it would be a different story.

"....."

Even for Roland, it would be difficult to face two countries as its opponents, he thought.

However, Runa was an ally of Roland.

As such, Nelpha no longer had any chance of winning. There was no other way other than to surrender.

In other words, for the short term, there was no way but for Toale to first capture Starnel, become the king, and issue a surrender, and before Roland catches him, escape out of the country.

As he unfolded the various development scenarios in his head,

"Aah, this is bothersome."

Upon groaning, Selues nodded.

"Yeah. It's extremely bothersome. That's why there's not much time left. According to Kiefer Knolles, you are supposed to have arrived yesterday. What in the world were you doing?"

Ryner's face turned serious at that and he looked at Selues.

"Sorry we're late. Even though we were already rushing all the way here, it was my calculation mistake. But, I'm not going to make another mistake hereon. I'll save this country, and save Toale's life. So can you lead us to Toale?"

Selues then grabbed hold of the reins of Ryner's horse and led them.

"Here."

"Right."

Once again, the horse started off slowly.

Ahead of where Selues was leading them, was a small tent. Outside of that tent, was a familiar group, made up of a golden hair girl, a black hair boy and his childhood girl friend, playing.

Iris, Arua, and Kuku.

At that moment, Iris noticed Ryner's group.

"Ah ~! Wild Beast-kun ~!"

She shouted.

Arua then turned towards here as well,

"Ryner-sensei!"

Following that, the tent opened, and out came Kiefer, with her hand waving.

Ryner then waved back at her, and lastly.....

A man around the same age of Ryner came out of the tent. With brown hair and a kind face. However, compared to the time he met him a year ago, the face was more drawn. It was filled with more fatigue.

Just from that, he could see what he had been through for the past few weeks.

Ryner smiled at Toale.

And in response to that.

"....."

Toale returned with a wry, troubled smile.

Ryner then turned around.

"Hey, Ferris."

"....."

"Ferris, wake up. We have reached. There should be a bed somewhere, go sleep there."

On hearing that, without opening her eyes,

"Hah ~, then, carry me there."

"Walk on your own."

"Carry me there like a princess."

"Huuuuhhhhhhhh? Huuhhhhhh? You, with so many people looking....."

But, upon saying that, she grabbed hold of Ryner's neck. And while strangling him,

"You're so annoying. If you dare wake me again..... I'll kill you, get it?"

As she said that, her fingers seemed to be really crushing Ryner's neck,

"Hey, I get ittttttttt! Whether is it like a princess or groom, I'll carry you so don't kill me."

"Um. Then, please carry on. I'll be going back to sleep."

"..... jeez."

Ryner sighed out loudly, and following that, he dismounted the horse. After that, he brought down Ferris, who had descended into deep sleep.

Then, in her desired princess cradle fashion, he carried the bothersome princess,

"A princesssssssssssssss!"

Iris made a jab as she clung to Ferris's chest.

The weight of the two people on Ryner's hip. His hip seemed about to sprain. He really felt like killing the two troublesome sisters.

But.

"..... uhwu, I have to bear with it until I get her to a bed. Do your best, Ryner. I'll be able to relax when she sleeps....."

He encouraged himself, and started walking.

Following that, Kiefer came to him.

"....."

While staring at him, she smiled kindly.

But, somehow, it was different from the smile just now. She was looking intently at him with a somewhat, transfixed, biting gaze, and softly,

"..... princess cradle."

"Eh? What?"

"Nothing."

"But you know, these two people are really heavy..... hey, Kiefer, can you help me?"

Ryner asked, to which Kiefer said,

"Nope."

"Eh?"

"No way."

"Erm....."

But, at that moment, she grinned,

"Just kidding ~. It was a joke, a joke. I'll help you. The past few days have been tough on you guys right? You're tired right?"

While saying that, she supported Ryner's arms, and pushed upwards. With that, his burden lessened.

"Oh, that really helps."

"That's great."

"Thanks."

"Yeah!"

Kiefer acknowledged happily.

Following that, Ryner once again looked in front of him, at Toale.

For some reason, with a seemingly bad mood, he was looking at him --- rather, at Kiefer.

"Hn? What's wrong, Toale?"

On hearing Ryner's words, his face turned to one of surprise,

"Eh? Umm..... ah ~, no, nothing. Long time no see, Ryner-san."

"Long time no see."

Upon saying that, Ryner wanted to wave his hands, but realizing that both his arms were encumbered, he merely nodded his head at him.

Toale then rushed up to him.

"Do you need help?"

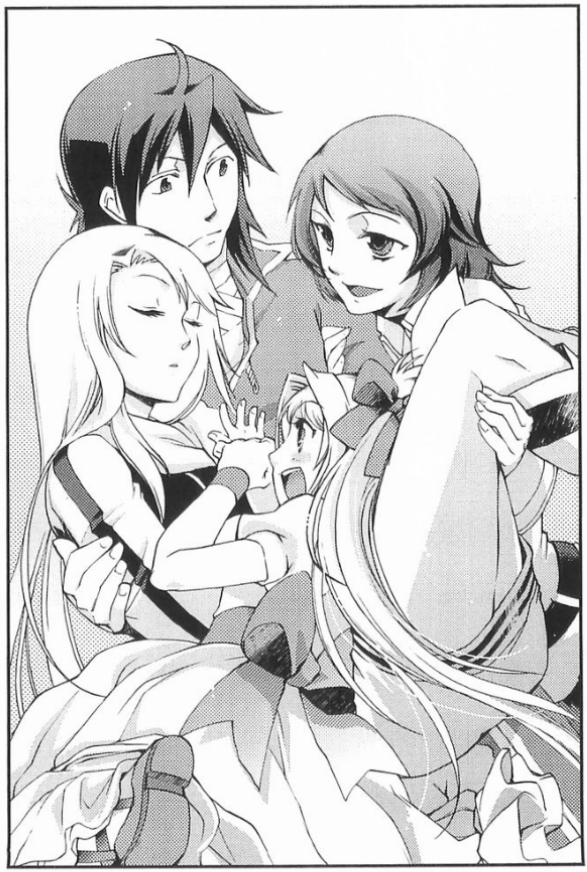
"Yeah, can you help me with the top one."

Toale nodded, and lifted up Iris, who had been clinging to Ferris's chest.

Iris's face then lit up,

"Wah! It's high, are you bringing me higher!? Iris loves that!"

On hearing that, Toale lifted Iris up and down. Following that, he looked at Ryner,



"Well Ryner-san, I would have never expected to reunite with you under such circumstances."

Ryner nodded as well. He smiled wryly at the tight-fitting, seemingly unsuitable military uniform that Toale was wearing.

"Yeah. I've never thought so either. So to speak, it became something real bothersome."

Following that, Toale opened the entrance to the tent. Inside was a simple bed, and he pointed to it,

"Over there."

"Yeah."

Ryner nodded as he carried Ferris there. He put Ferris down on the bed, and hugging the pillow, she slept comfortably.

"Thanks for your hard work."

Ryner then said smilingly.

Following that, once again, Kiefer looked at him with a slightly angry face.

Ryner cocked his head to the side.

"So, what's wrong?"

"N-o-t-h-i-n-g."

"Hey, those words sounded rather thorny."

"No they don't."

"Yes they do."

"I said no, they don't"

"Really?"

"Yup."

"Well ok..... forget it then."

"No way."

"Eeeehhh?"

"Humph."

Kiefer turned her face away from him and went out of the tent.

With an incomprehensible look on his face,

"..... what the hell was that?"

Ryner asked Toale.

On hearing that, for some reason, he also made an unpleasant face,

"Please don't ask me."

"Toale, why are you angry as well?"

"I'm not angry."

"Really?"

"Yes. More importantly....."

Upon saying that, he looked at Ryner.

And smiled.

"Really, long time no see. Ryner-san, I'm really happy to hear that you are coming here to help me. *I'm coming here to save you. The reason is because we're friends. Ok?*, those words, frankly speaking, made me want to cry."

He said, to which Ryner smiled.

"Was that a little too mushy?"

"Nope. It was a great thing to me, who was depressed from getting cornered in all directions."

"Is that so. That's great then."

Ryner nodded, pulled up a nearby chair and sat down.

Toale then said,

"Should I brew some tea like what we did in the past?"

"Ah ~, the tea you brewed was really good. But, forget it now. There's really not much time left. Erm, so the situation we are now in....."

"I have already heard everything from Kiefer-san. As to where did you come from, and why are you here now....."

Upon saying that, Toale looked at Ryner with a pair of somewhat reproachful eyes,

"..... jeez, Ryner-san, you really had me with all those lies. You are a person from Roland right. And on top of that, the best friend of that hero king, Sion Astal. And to top if off, a year ago, you introduced that Sion-san as your cousin and ate in my house....."

On hearing that, Ryner nodded with a somewhat apologetic face.

That's right, that's how it was.

Ryner had met Toale and withheld his true identity then.

During that time, as a spy from Roland, he had to hide his identity while searching for the Heroes' Relics together with Ferris.

They had then visited Imperial Nelpha, Runa Empire, and Iyet Republic before returning back to Roland again.

On top of that, Toale had met Sion.

At that time, Sion was on a formal visit, calling on the grandfather of Toale, the previous king of Imperial Nelpha, Gread Nelphi, and had asked Ryner to become his bodyguard.

And so, Sion then went to the place where Ryner was at, which was Toale's house, and they had dined together on the same table.

"....."

During that time, he couldn't possibly have imagined that the relationship between Sion and Toale would have become such a bothersome thing.

Ryner nodded, and said.

"..... yeah. When we met you, Sion was masquerading as my cousin."

Toale then smiled vexedly.

"That fine young man is the hero king huh..... a powerful enemy indeed."

"Well, yeah. He's really a workaholic..... it will be a troublesome thing to surpass him."

"But we're going to surpass him right?"

"If not, you will be dead."

"Yeah. But, can I trust you? Ryner-san, you are the best friend of Sion-san right? I am a little doubtful that you will betray him and truly come here to help me. Perhaps, this is just Sion-san's ploy....."

However, Ryner shook his head immediately,

"No way."

He denied it outright.

But still,

"Even if you say that, I don't have enough information to make an assessment though. Now, with the lives of tens of thousands of people on my shoulder, will I be able to see this through correctly.....?"

Said Toale.

Ryner then looked intently at Toale,

"Are you pressuring me to explain everything to you?"

Toale nodded.

"Yes, that's right. Even if it's me, I can't move too carelessly while carrying the lives of so many others."

"Well, you're right though. So, what do you want to know?"

"The first thing I want to ask is about the time when you first made contact with me. Was all that an act? Did you send that hoodlum to put up an act in order to get to me, who has royal blood flowing inside my veins?"

Said Toale.

When he said that.

Ryner felt a number of extraordinary killing intent from the surroundings outside of the tent. The tent was probably surrounded by soldiers.

"..... woah, Toale-chan I say, you're pretty cautious."

Ryner said in a light manner.

Following that, Ferris's eyes opened in response to that killing intent,

"..... hey Ryner."

But immediately, Ryner said,

"Go sleep, Ferris. There's no problem. I just need to explain things a little."

"But."

"I said it's fine. You're tired right? Just sleep. In the first place, with this level of opponents, I can take care of them myself. In the worst case, I'll take Toale hostage."

Ferris then replied,

"..... well, you have a point."

"That's right."

"Got it. But, if something....."

"I said it's fine. You should know that Toale and I are good buddies right? So, don't worry and sleep."

After Ryner said that, Ferris nodded and went back to sleep.

After ascertaining that, Ryner looked at Toale. With a troubled face. Then,

"Withdraw your troops. I told you I'm your ally right?"

However, without taking his eyes off him, Toale said,

"..... but you're the best friend of Sion."

Best friend --- Toale had said.

Ryner made a sad face on hearing that,

"Yeah."

And he nodded.

"Yeah, that's right. But, for Sion's sake as well, I won't let him kill you."

"For Sion's sake, you say?"

"Yeah. His way of thinking is already different from mine. We're looking in different directions now."

While saying that, *but, isn't it because we have been looking in different directions right from the start*, Ryner thought.

Even when he was shouldering everything, suffering, and on the verge of tears, he was a fool who would not even confide in his best friend.

Even when he had already been looking in a different direction, he had hidden his weeping face, and had kept on smiling perhaps.

That's why this had happened.

That's why things had progressed to this unrecoverable state.

However, he could more or less understand his thought process.

"..... he..... Sion probably wants to use the shortest amount of time to eradicate fighting in the world. Choosing the path with the least number of sacrifices, and advancing along that path. But I'm a little different. I can't distinguish between many lives and few lives, I think. Whether it is sacrificing you to save

hundreds of thousands of lives, or sacrificing Sion to save millions of lives, I can't forgive something as stupid as that. At the very least, I don't want that. If you die, I'll cry, if Sion dies, I'll cry. But I hate crying."

Toale then smiled wryly.

"You're so willful."

"..... perhaps. But, that's probably what's different between me and him."

"Ryner-san, because you're too willful right?"

Ryner smiled,

"That's right."

He said.

"But, he should have the same kind of thinking as me. At any rate, he's the type of person who hates fighting, a person who hates crying, but yet, since there was no one who could save that rotten country, he became king even though he didn't really want to you know? So there's no way a gentle person like him, could kill you, or the people of Nelpha without batting an eyelid, just because this is something necessary, he isn't the kind of person who can decide this so easily with a smiling face, you know?"

Well, the truth was that he wasn't the kind of person who can come to such decisions easily. Otherwise, Ryner would not no longer be alive by now.

An **Alpha Stigma** bearer is an accursed creature who would end up killing others. Then, in order to save many other lives, he should have killed the Ryner, who's in danger of going berserk anytime, right away, in order to avoid such a calamity.

But yet, he didn't kill him.

Holding a knife while yelling how he would kill him, but yet, in the end, he didn't kill Ryner.

"He's really..... a fool. He's always carrying everything by himself and weeping by himself. But still, he started moving forward..... because he had no choice. But, I want to stop him. And I want to look for another way with him. I want to tell him that he's not alone, and doesn't need to shoulder everything by himself. But, I'm no longer by his side. My voice can no longer reach him. That's why I'm aiming higher. I want to reach a place where my loud voice can reach him. For that purpose, I....."

At that juncture, while looking intently at Ryner, Toale began,

"For that purpose, you've come to save me."

Ryner nodded.

"..... both of you are my friends. I've already said this earlier, but I hate to see my friends cry or die."

"..... I see. But I heard that Sion-san wants to kill you..... and you still want to save Sion-san in spite of that?"

But, to that question,

"Don't make me repeat myself please."

Ryner replied promptly.

Toale then smiled.

".....even when you are faced with that, you hate to see your friend cry..... and because I'm a friend, you will risk your life to protect me? That's quite reassuring huh."

Ryner shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if you keep annoying me by making me say those lines again and again, I won't be your friend anymore."

On hearing that, *haha*, Toale laughed out loud. Following that,

"Then, during the first time we met....."

"That was purely a coincidence. I didn't know about your identity then, and even if I did, it didn't matter. However, that's not the case with Roland. They see your popularity as a threat. You were asleep then so you didn't know this, but a year ago, when we were putting up at your house, Roland had sent an assassin, but got driven off by us. Well, during then, I didn't know that he was an assassin from Roland as well....."

At that moment, Ryner recalled the time when the assassin came to kill Toale.

He remembered the unpleasant guy called Miran Froaude, who had eyes cold like the devil, and wielded a Heroes' Relic.

The first time he fought him was in the backyard of Toale's house.

He never would have thought that Froaude was the subordinate of Sion.

Was that also.

Was that assassination attempt also carried out on the orders of Sion? If that's true, then right from the start, he was already looking in a different direction from Sion.

"....."

Well, even if he worried about it now, there was nothing he could do about it, so he brushed those thoughts aside.

Meanwhile, Toale had an expression of surprise on his face at hearing that.

"I didn't hear about it."

"We didn't tell you."

"You should have told me."

"Even if I had told you, it wouldn't amount to anything."

"Eh? No, that's true but..... but doesn't that mean my life got saved twice by you guys?"

But, Ryner waved his hand to brush that aside.

"You gave us food, a place to sleep, and on top of that let us into the library, we are even."

"Erm no, that can't make us even right."

"You think so?"

"Yeah."

"Then, trust me this time. That will make us even."

"But, aren't you doing this to save me....."

However, Ryner shook his head.

"That's not it. I'm also asking you to lend me a hand to save Sion."

Upon saying that, Ryner held his hand out to Toale.

And said.

"Can you lend me a hand?"

He looked intently at Toale with a serious expression on his face.

Then, *wasn't this how Sion held his hand out to me?*, Ryner thought in the corner of his mind.

Let's go together, Ryner thought back to the time when Sion had held his hand out to him.

That really saved him. Having been engulfed in loneliness and thinking that he was better off dead, that one line really saved him.

But it was different now.

He was no longer the one being saved, but the one who will try to save, he thought.

Of course, he didn't think that he could do it as well as Sion.

"....."

That's why Ryner held his hand out to Toale. Moreover, he didn't know whether he could be saved. No, to have taken this path, he didn't know whether he could save Toale, and after that Sion.

But, he could no longer bear seeing others get hurt and not do anything about it.

He had to move forward.

Whatever the result might be, he shall shoulder all that and move forward, Ryner thought.

Just like what Sion did.

Just like how he has saved the me who has been running away all this while.

That's why Ryner stretched his hand straight out to Toale.

Toale then looked at that hand. He looked intently at it with a troubled face.

It was difficult to make a determined decision. He was carrying tens of thousands of lives on his back. If he made a mistake, there was a possibility that all those lives would be lost.

He was probably fearful of that.

He was fearful of carrying all that.

A weight that was as heavy as the one as Sion, who was enduring everything like an idiot and screaming in anguish.

That was why Toale looked at Ryner's hand silently for a while.

But in the end,

"..... jeez, you got me. Coming at me straight in that manner with my troops surrounding the tent, doesn't that make me feel embarrassed?"

While saying that, he took Ryner's hand. And then,

"I understand. I shall trust you. You won't be falsifying your identity again, right?"

He smiled upon saying that.

To which Ryner smiled as well,

"No, I'm still fake this time you know? The truth is the hardworking me you're seeing now is a fake, the real me really wants to dump everything and take an afternoon nap."

On hearing that, Toale said,

"I know that, you know? I also want to dump everything and take a nice afternoon nap."

"You said it."

"Yes. But, we can't run away from troublesome things..... and what should our future plans be?"

On hearing that question, Ryner released Toale's hand. He scratched his head and started thinking again.

Originally, Ryner's plan was like this.

To look for valuable, capable people to protect the commoners with the soldiers.

In the meantime, Ryner will bring along Toale to subdue Starnel.

If however, Roland breaks its agreement and attacks while Ryner and Toale are not around, then the plan will change.

The Nelpha troops will carry the flags of Roland and attack Runa, then pretend to lose and run away.

This act should create a powerful threat to Roland.

At any rate, if things go badly, the alliance relationship between Runa and Roland could sour terribly.

Of course, since Runa and Roland are allies, there was a possibility that Runa has already been alerted to this plan of Ryner's, but that would not pose a problem.

The problem was how other countries would view the troops carrying Roland's flags getting beaten off by Runa.

Say for an example, what will happen if that is known to Cassla?

No, even if not other countries.

What will happen if this news reach the troops led by Starnel?

What if the soldiers of Runa were misled into thinking that their ally, Roland, was fearful of them?

The rumor would spread easily.

It's even better if it's a bad rumor.

And if that kind of rumor were to spread, the image of a mighty Roland that Sion was trying to paint would crumble. In this way, the image of nobody being able to resist against Roland who held an absolute amount of overbearing power, would easily crumble.

The other countries in the south would form an alliance and there was a possibility that Roland would no longer be able to advance northwards easily.

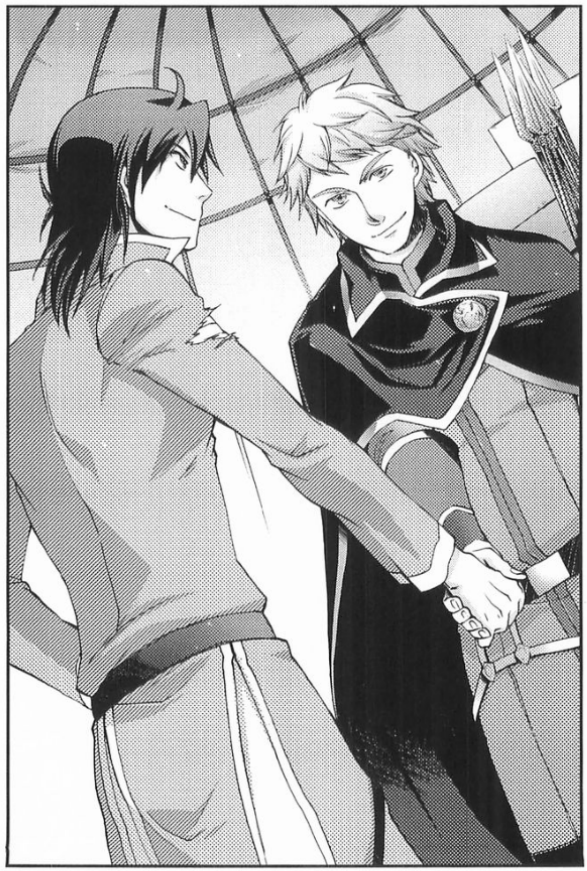
That's why the plan should work easily.

Since Sion is a gentle person who will choose the path with the lowest number of sacrifices.

That's why, just by doing the things they ought to do, even without attacking Runa, the plan should succeed.

Ryner was then about to explain the plan to Toale.

It's fine.



He was about to explain it to him and tell him it's okay to follow him.

But, at that moment.

Before Ryner could explain the plan to Toale.

"....."

Abruptly, everything started going crazy.

Suddenly, the entrance to the tent opened.

"Hn?"

Ryner turned his gaze there.

Standing there, was the face of a familiar man.

Golden hair tied up behind him, a calm face.

That was the man who Ferris took hostage when Ryner attacked Claugh a few days ago.

His name was Shuss Shirazz, if he remembered correctly.

An excellent vice-commander of Claugh.

Ryner looked at Shuss with tinge of surprise,

"Oh, they sent a messenger at a surprisingly early time. Have you already told Sion my suggestion?"

On hearing that, Shuss nodded. Then,

"..... we did."

As he said that, for some reason, his face looked dark and a little pained.

On seeing that, Ryner asked with a puzzled look.

"..... so, what did he say? You've come here to give a reply because he accepted right? At any rate, he should not have any a choice other than to accept this plan....."

But, cutting his words off, Shuss said.

"No. The reply has not come yet."

"Huh? There's no reply?"

"Yes."

"Then, what did you come here for? If there's no reply, there's no meaning in you coming here right?"

On hearing Ryner's words, Shuss made an even more pained expression,

"..... the truth is that I came here not on His Majesty's orders, but to pass a message to you from Field Marshal Claugh Klom."

"From red-hair?"

"Yes."

On hearing that, Ryner face became increasingly more puzzled.

As if he had entirely no clue.

He had never expected that in this situation, it was not a reply from Sion, but a message from Claugh. That's why he could not guess what kind of message it would be.

But.

He knew that it would not be something good. He knew that immediately just by looking at Shuss's face.

Looking at the dark expression on Shuss's face, Ryner asked.

"So, what is it? What did that muscle idiot red-hair want to tell

me? Did he say I'm annoying and that he wanted to kill me?"

Following that, in a grave voice unmatching of that light tone of Ryner, Shuss said.

"No. Field Marshal, his Honor, told you to..... 'Run away'....."

Run away.

Ryner cocked his head at those words.

"Huh? Run away? What is the meaning of that? Why do I have to run away? We are the ones threatening Roland right? Right now, you shouldn't be able to take on both Runa and Nelpha right. In order to prevent that, Sion definitely has to accept my idea....."

However, Shuss cut him off there,

"..... Roland has already started invading Runa Empire."

He said.

Ryner's eyes widened at that,

"..... what."

He could only utter.

But, Shuss continued.

"His Majesty made no reply to your message. He ignored it totally. And, Roland has already passed the southern borders of Runa, and advancing northwards at an overwhelming speed. The commander is Marshal Bayuuz White and, Lieutenant General Miran Froaude. Without accepting Runa's surrender, they are now massacring people. And we have also received our orders. Until we have killed both Starnel Nelphi and Toale Nelphi, do not relax on your attacks. Show

them Roland's might --- it said."

On hearing that.

On hearing that, Ryner.

"....."

Was at a loss for words.

He then desperately turned over what Shuss had said in his head. Unable to breathe, his face pale, he thought desperately.

Shuss had said.

"His Majesty made no reply to your message."

Shuuss had said that.

But, he thought otherwise.

The reply had already come.

Sion had already made his stand on Ryner's plan.

I'll not accede to your wise plan. Roland shall, without borrowing your power, challenge the world with its might, speed, fearsomeness, and massiveness.

In order to do that, I don't care how much sacrifices there will be. Even if it amounts to hundreds of thousands, or even millions of lives.

The balance Sion was using has become a gigantic one.

On realizing that, Ryner uttered,

"..... damn."

He spat.

He had made another mistake.

He had made another mistake in his calculations.

Because of that, large numbers of people will die.

Because of my stupidity, foolishness, and my lack of consideration, many people will die.

Because my resolve has yet reached the level of Sion's, large numbers of people will die once again.

Upon thinking that,

"..... damn damn damn."

He wanted to cry.

He wanted to run away.

He wanted to run away to a faraway place right now.

But there was no place to run to. He was already shouldering large numbers of lives.

Even if he was slapped with sudden despair, and wanted to scream in anguish.

"....."

He could only move forward like what Sion did.

He could only move forward like him.

Since the gears were spinning.

Since they were spinning crazily, intensely.

That's why Ryner.

"....."

Looked up.

He glared at Shuss, and with a low, cracked voice,

"..... Roland already has the power to crush both Nelpha and Runa at the same time?"

He asked.

However, that was a foolish question.

The results had been proven.

Runa had already declared their surrender, but Roland did not accept it and continued to raze them.

And that performance was probably creating a dramatic effect. As a result of having razed and crushed two countries, Nelpha and Runa, with overwhelming might, Roland has created an image of itself to other countries as a fearsome country that will not accept any kind of surrender once it starts waging war.

It would be able to make other countries tremble in fear with that image.

So the next time when it moves again, others will proclaim a surrender without even putting up a resistance, allowing Roland to proceed unhindered.

For that purpose.

"....."

For that purpose, there was meaning to the massacre this time.

This was the best choice to minimize the number of sacrifices in the future.

In order to take the path of least sacrifices, Sion had again taken the lives of large numbers of people.

In order to take the shortest path, Sion had again chosen the lives of large numbers of people.

The one who had yet the resolve.

The one who had yet to make his resolve,

"..... is me."

Ryner said groaningly with a face that was on the verge of crying.

But, he had really never thought that Roland would be able to acquire such overwhelming power to be able take on both Nelpha and Runa at the same time. It was beyond his expectations.

"..... damn. That's also my calculation mistake."

Ryner muttered.

Even when he had been spending that same time with Sion, he had never noticed it.

He had never once noticed the depth of the darkness he bore.

He regretted it.

Even when the regrets did not help him, he regretted.

Ryner said.

"..... I understand now what Sion is doing. So, Claugh is

asking me to run away?"

Shuss nodded.

"In two more days, we'll start advancing our troops again. The next time we meet on the battlefield, we intend to kill all of you. But for just two days..... we'll stop at our current location. In the meantime....."

Ryner continued from there.

"..... in the meantime, you want us to run away? In other words, this time, Claugh is unsatisfied with Sion's order?"

But, Shuss said.

"No, he didn't say that. Field Marshal, His Honor, will definitely not go against the orders of His Majesty."

Even if he said that, Claugh would not be setting off immediately, and would be delaying things for two days. On top of that, he even told Ryner about the current situation, where Sion had started attacking Runa.

If this is not going against his orders, then what else is?

But Ryner instead said,

"I see."

Shuss nodded again.

"That's right. And my mission ends here. The next time we meet will be....."

"On the battlefield?"

"Yes. The next time I will be killing you. I won't be so easily defeated like the last time, so brace yourself."

Upon saying that, Shuss turned on his heel. With that, he started exiting the tent.

To his back,

"..... tell Claugh thanks for his help."

On hearing that, Shuss merely waved lightly and left the tent.

Looking after his departing figure,

"....."

Ryner took a deep breath and breathed out. As if he were letting go of the built up despair in his body, he breathed out with all his strength.

And once again, he looked at the Toale beside him.

Toale was making a complicated face. Looking at that face,

"I'm sorry Toale. The plan's all messed up."

"I've heard."

"So, with regards to what's next....."

Upon saying that, a tired smile surfaced on Toale's lips,

"I shall show myself to Roland, and get executed publicly.....?"

But Ryner shook his head.

"That's useless. Roland is not even willing to accept the surrender of Runa, we don't know how far they will go with the massacring until they are satisfied..... well, at the very least, the soldiers who followed you will be killed."

Toale then smiled sadly.

"Uwah, that is a little..... too much for me. It's all because of my fault to have led these soldiers....."

"No, that's not it. If you hadn't stopped these soldiers, they would have already been killed by Claugh. You have saved their lives."

"It's just for a few days though..... but, then, what should we do?"

On hearing those words, Ryner kept quiet again.

As he pondered, he looked up at the roof part of the tent. The sunlight that was passing through the tent top was red.

The sun was already setting.

Night was falling.

When night comes, they won't be able to move.

However, there was not much time left.

Roland's troops were pressing in from the south, as well as from Runa's side.

If they don't run, they'll get killed.

Everyone'll get killed.

Realizing that.

"....."

Realizing that, Ryner called out,

"Major Selues."

The entrance to the tent opened. Selues entered.

"What is it?"

Ryner said to the solemn face of his.

"My plan has failed. Roland's troops will be attacking from Runa's side. We need to escape now. So mobilize the troops. We're running."

Selues then stared at him,

"What about the commoners?"

"Scatter them, to the west. We shall go north, straight through the Autonomous Holy City of Cassla. Roland's forces will probably come after us."

"I see. So we are the decoy for the commoners to get away. That's a great way to die."

On hearing his words, Ryner's face contorted.

"..... sorry."

However, on the solemn face of Selues, a thin smile surfaced for the first time.

"No, you made the right choice. I can trust you a little more with this."

Upon saying that, he turned around. Then,

"The situation has changed! We need to change locations again!"

While yelling, he went outside.

After ascertaining that, Ryner turned towards Toale.

"Then, let's go, Toale. There's already no more time left. Let's get going quickly. Since you are the one being targeted, you should be moving right at the front."

However, for some reason, Toale smiled sadly,

"..... no, I can't do that. I shall stay back."

As he said that, Ryner's face contorted again.

"Huh? Why? What are you going to do here?"

Toale then said,

"..... I shall remain here and buy some time by negotiating with Roland....."

However, before he could finish, Ryner said,

"Idiot!"

He yelled.

"Use your head Toale! If you were to remain here, most of the troops who have followed you will also remain here right. What will then happen to them? Do you want everyone to die with you? You're leaving. Take the soldiers and flee to Cassla."

To which Toale made an unsettled face,

"Will Cassla take in the soldiers of Nelpha?"

However, Ryner promptly replied,

"I don't know. But, other than that, there's no other way. At any rate, if you stay here, everyone will get killed. We have no choice but to try. Now that we're going to do it..... now that we're going to do it, I'll..... definitely not let you die. Even

though we were talking about decoys earlier there's no need to die. Before Roland catches up to us, we'll pass through Cassla. You'll live and get away. Everyone will get away and laugh in the end. So don't foolishly talk about dying again. Get it?"

In response to that strong tone of Ryner, Toale looked intently at him and said,

"..... got it."

And nodded. Then, with a somewhat delighted smile,

"And thanks for coming here to help me..... Ryner."

He said.

Not Ryner-san, he dropped the honorifics and called him Ryner.

On hearing that, with a somewhat embarrassed and vexed face, Ryner began,

"Aah jeez, don't worry about stuff like that. Now, go to where Major Selues is. If you take command, the soldiers will probably move faster. Get a thousand troops to remove their military uniforms to protect the commoners and disperse them. The remaining soldiers shall head north....."

But, at that moment before he could finish ---

Instantly.

"Gyaaa

heads spin sounded.

In response to that.

"....."

In response to that, Ryner's eyes widened in shock.

"No way....."

He murmured.

But, once again.

"Heeee

Ryner knew about all that.

It was a large-scale magic used by Roland.

"..... what the hell is happening!?"

Ryner yelled as he rushed out of the tent.

At the instant he exited the tent.

The night sky, the dark night sky was lit up.

Before Ryner's eyes, tens of people.

"....."

Were reduced to ashes in an instant.

Screams were heard from men, women, children, and the elderly who were roasted from the high temperatures caused by magic.

Screams rang out.

And then they got roasted.

The people who were roasted by the intense fire died.

"..... uwah..... damn, shit....."

Ryner trembled as he saw that. He couldn't move.

However, from the hell-like scene, Kiefer came dashing over.

"Ryner! Roland's troops are approaching from the borders at Runa's side....."

She was also on the verge of tears. In her arms was a four, five year old girl who was injured.

Looking at that.

Looking at Kiefer's teary face,

Ryner was brought back to his senses. Looking intently at her,

"..... I got it. Let's run away immediately. Selues! Protect everyone and make for the north! Move the troops! Get them to counter Roland's large-scale magic attack!"

At that voice of Ryner, Selues gave out orders and the soldiers started moving.

Following that, Toale came out of the tent as well and he told him.

"Toale, you go lead the people and escape."

"But."

"No buts. If you're not there, no one will move. Don't just stand there and get moving! I'll do something about the rear somehow, you just focus on getting everyone out of here!"

On hearing that, Toale wanted to say something again, but he relented, nodded once, and ran off.

Ryner looked at his departing figure, then said to the unsettled Kiefer beside him,

"Kiefer."

"Yes."

"Take Iris, Arua, and Kuku with you and follow Toale."

She then made an anguished face. She made a face as if wanting to say that she wants to fight with him here. But instead, her face contorted painfully and she said,

"..... got it."

She then carried the girl in a hugging fashion, and said,

"I'll do my best in supporting Toale to help him get into Cassla. But, Ryner also....."

However, at that juncture, he stopped paying attention to her words. He didn't have the luxury of time to listen to that

anymore.

If he tarried further, the next large-scale magic attack would come. If that were to happen, tens of people, hundreds of people would die again.

He needed to defend against that.

Ryner looked in the direction of where the magic came from.

He looked in that direction and widened his eyes.

Following that, red pentacle shapes surfaced on the center of his black pupils and glowed.

Cursed eyes known as **Alpha Stigma**.

With those eyes of his, he tried to locate the faraway large-scale magic spell formation.

But, he couldn't see it.

He couldn't see the construct of the magic.

Was it because they had yet to start creating the large-scale magic, or was it because the troops were charging straight towards here without deploying the large-scale magic?

"Damn, if I can't see it, I can't come up with the counter spell....."

But at that moment.

"I say, Ryner!?"

His face got punched heavily from the side.

"Uoh?"

Ryner uttered.

Following that, he turned towards the one who punched him.

The same tearful Kiefer was standing there.

"Erm, eh? Why did you punch me?"

To his question, she said with an angry face.

"Because you are not listening to what I'm saying!"

"Erm, what you're saying?"

"Yeah!"

"B-but, this is not the time....."

But, she cut him off,

"It's precisely because of that, that I'm telling some seriously important stuff right! So listen up properly!"

She said menacingly.

On hearing that,

"..... erm, ah ~, alright. I'm sorry....."

Uhm, Kiefer then nodded at Ryner's apology.

"It's great that you understand."

"Er, erm, so Kiefer, what do you want to tell me?"

Kiefer looked once to the sky from which the large-scale magic was invoked, and then looked back at Ryner.

Then, with a serious-looking face,

"Since there isn't much time, I'm going to say all the important stuff that Ryner needs to know in one breath, ok?"

She said.

Ryner nodded in response.

She then exhaled softly, following that, she took a deep breath.

"..... here goes. Ryner. If say, you are unable to stop Roland's forces here and Nelpha's people and soldiers get massacred, it'd not be your fault. So don't go throwing away your life to save them, get it? I think from hereon, you'll be someone who will save a lot more lives. That's why you can't afford to die here. If you were to die easily here, then you're merely a brainless fool. A fool who won't be able to save Sion. But if you're not a fool, and really want to save a lot more lives..... it's forbidden for you to die here. Get it?"

On hearing those words, Ryner became flustered,

"Erm, but....."

"Buts are also forbidden. If you die, I'll commit suicide as well. I'll definitely do it you know?"

"Eeeeeeeeeh, hey, Kiefe....."

But, with a serious-looking face that was really on the verge of crying, she continued.

"I'm serious ok? I don't want to live in a world without you. So if you end up being unable to stop Roland's forces, run away. Get it?"

On hearing those words.

"....."

While Ryner was yet unable to reply, Kiefer started again,

"I'm asking you whether you get it or not!!"

She yelled loudly.

He trembled a little,

".....I-I, got it."

"Alright! Then go!"

"..... erm."

"Hurry up! If not, I'm really going to cry!!"

While shouting, Kiefer had in fact started crying. In response to that, Ryner frantically turned his face away,

"Erm, er ~, sorry."

"Uh-huh."

"Then, I'm off."

"Right..... you must definitely not die."

Kiefer said from behind.

Ryner then nodded,

"Kiefer, don't die as well."

"Uhn. Then..... see ya."

"Aah. See ya."

Upon saying that, Ryner started running.

Firstly, back to the tent. Ferris was already awake.

"What's happening?"

"Roland is attacking."

On hearing those words, her face became a little dazed and she said,

"..... horh. So, what are you planning to do?"

"Go receive them for a bit while the others escape. Wanna join me?"

A thin smile floated on her face. She then drew the sword at her waist.

"..... well, if I'm not around, you will be trembling in fear like a weak worm, pee in your pants and die. Jeez! You're already an adult and still pee in your pants, aren't you ashamed of yourself!"

"Hey, what are you talking about?"

Another smile appeared,

"I'm lending you a hand so that you don't pee in your pants."

After saying that, she swung her sword, and sliced apart the tent flaps.

Then, beyond the sliced portion. Far beyond that.

"....."

Ryner could see a light construct forming up.

It was a large scale lightning attack magic, **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lighting).

There were three of them.

"..... three, huh."

Too little. Ryner thought.

If Roland's main forces were closing in, there will be ten times more **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lighting).

In other words, right now, the ones that were attacking them were a smaller vanguard.

A force to hold them here while the main forces arrive.

So that none of them could escape.

"....."

In other words, they were attacking in order to massacre all the soldiers and commoners, without letting any one of them escape.

"..... damn. You're going to this extent huh, Sion."

Ryner groaned while he looked intently at the forming **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lighting).

If these three **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lighting) were completed, hundreds of people would be killed again.

However, they had only just started to form up. And Ryner knew how to shut down that magic. No. Even if, say, he didn't know, with his special pair of eyes he would be able to discover the way to shut it down.

A smile surfaced on Ryner.

"..... well, but, at this level, it's still possible to barely counteract them."

Upon saying that, he looked around him. And as expected, he

found a group of Nelpha soldiers who were about to make a large scale magical attack,

"Hey you guys, that won't do. More importantly, don't you have any water-based magic?"

At that question, a soldier answered.

"Water, you say? We do..... but the power....."

But, cutting him off, Ryner said.

"We don't need power. We just need something simplified. Focus on the speed. The next coming attack would be lightning magic, you guys just render that ineffective....."

At that moment, from beside him, Ferris broke into a run.

Towards the enemy.

In the direction where the Roland soldiers appeared to be.

After looking at her back, Ryner once again turned to the soldiers and said.

"..... you guys just stop their large scale magical attack once, in the meantime, we'll keep them in check, can you do it?"

But the soldiers appeared to be flustered,

"B-But, how did you know that the enemies are launching a lightning magical attack on us....."

But Ryner cut him off,

"I'm an **Alpha Stigma** bearer. I can tell what kind of magic the other side is using and where they will be coming from."

He said.

On hearing that.

On hearing his words.

A look of fear appeared on the soldiers' faces. And they peered into the eyes of Ryner.

At the red pentacles floating above the center of his black eyes ---

Following that, their faces became increasingly contorted with fear.

The killer eyes.

The massacring cursed eyes.

Once those crazy eyes go berserk, a scene of carnage and despair will ensue.

That's why everyone hated those cursed eyes.

Hated the people who possess those eyes.

Hated Ryner.

That's why he ran away.

Since he didn't want to be looked upon in that manner again.

Since he didn't want to be looked upon by those fearful, loathing, demeaning eyes again.

"....."

But, at that moment, the soldier said.

Looking at him, looking at him with fearful eyes,

"..... I, I see..... t-that's really reassuring under such circumstances....."

Said the soldier in a trembling voice, to which Ryner said,

"..... isn't it?"

And he smiled.

Following that, he started giving instructions.

"So listen to me, and defend against their magic. Defending is enough. We'll do the attacking."

"Understood. So, which way....."

With that, Ryner pointed in two different directions with both his hands.

"One from this direction. And another one from this direction. And also one from there. They'll be invoking three rounds. From the current constructing speed, you have probably another five minutes. So, how long do you need?"

That soldier then turned around.

And another soldier behind said,

"For the simplified version, in two minutes."

"Then get to it now."

"Yes."

As the soldier acknowledged, the soldiers and commoners who were heading north had started to move.

"Oh, finally, the preparations to escape are done huh."

Ryner turned towards the crowd who were starting to move.

Aaarrrggghhh, sloooowwwww, Ryner wanted to holler at the moving crowd.

But it couldn't be helped.

There were both children and elderly. They were not trained soldiers.

Even if the vanguard sent out by Roland were to retreat, the main forces would probably catch up in no time.

However, even so, they couldn't give up. Even if it was only for a little while, they needed to escape northwards.

That's why.

"....."

That's why he fought.

At the battlefield.

Not only that, at last, he had to fight the soldiers of his own country.

His finger danced in the air, and started carving out glowing words. And then.

"I OFFER THE CONTRACTED WORDS, LETTING THE SLUMBERING MALICIOUS SPIRIT DWELL WITHIN."

He chanted.

His body sparkled and his movement speed increased.....

But, at that moment.

"Ryner-sensei!"

A voice sounded from behind him. It was the voice of Arua.

Ryner frowned and turned around.

"What are you doing! Hurry up and get out of here!"

But, Arua said,

"I....."

"I can't bring you along! This is not a situation where you can be useful! Go protect Kuku, Kiefer, and Iris!"

After saying that, he was about to ignore Arua and run off, but,

"No! I won't be a burden to Sensei! I've come here to bring you these."

On hearing those words,

"Huh?"

Ryner turned around.

Arua handed him a bunch of cloth-like objects that he was hugging against his chest,

"..... if you are going to fight Roland soldiers, won't it be easier to get close to them if you bring these along?"

He said.

Ryner took them. And opened them up.

They were the Roland flags which he had gotten Iris to prepare for him earlier.

Ryner then said,

"Ohhh, aren't you a smart one!"

Arua then smiled happily.

"Was I useful?"

"Very! As expected of my disciple!"

On hearing those words, Arua blushed and smiled, *ehhehe* like a kid.

"Well then, go back, and protect Kuku, Kiefer and Iris."

Arua then made a slightly worried face,

"What about Sensei....."

Ryner shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll be right back. Kiefer said that she'll get mad at me if I die, so I'll come back alive."

"..... is that a promise?"

"Yeah. It's a promise. Ok, I'm off."

"Alright."

"See you."

After saying that, Ryner started running.

He went in the opposite direction of the waves of people. Before long, he left the crowd. And on the other side.

On the side of the open field, was Ferris riding a horse.

While riding on a horse, with her left hand, she was holding

onto the reins of another horse running alongside her.

Ryner tried to catch up to her with everything he got, and gradually, gradually, the tiredness from the acceleration started seeping in,

"Ah, hey, Ferris! I can't do this! It's tiring to chase you! Could you stop for a little while?"

But,

"....."

Ferris ignored him.

"Heeeeeeeyyyy, you can hear me right! I'm telling you to stop!"

And at last, she turned around. And gleefully, *pahn pahn*, she clapped her hands,

"Mr Ogre, I'm here ♪, the sound of my hands....."

"Shuutttt uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuppppppppppppppppppppppppppp

Yelled Ryner as he accelerated even further. He ran at his full speed where he felt as if his legs were rupturing, and as the horse got closer, he kicked the ground.

With that, he got onto the back of the horse.

Zeh zeh, he groaned as he gripped the reins. Getting meaninglessly tired, his entire body was covered in sweat in an instant.

Looking at that, Ferris said,

"Ooh, you can do it if you try."

"Shut up. And, don't make me waste my energy like that....."

"Hm. But there's no time right? Before the enemy launches their next magical attack, we have to....."

"No, it'll be fine. The Nelpha soldiers will do something about that. Even though it'll indeed be terrible if they managed to invoke it next time....."

But, at that moment, Ferris faced the front and squinted her eyes. Ryner followed her sight.

He could tell that they were nearing the enemy squads. If the horses were to run at full speed, at this rate, they would probably be able to charge right in the enemy formation in three to four minutes.

Ferris said.

"Before the next magical attack, we can charge into the enemy it seems. But the problem is the enemy numbers. Do you think we can render them ineffective with just the two of us?"

On hearing those words, Ryner folded his arms.

"Uhn ~, I wonder ~"

The large scale magic, **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lightning) that was about to be invoked would need at least thirty casters.

In order to bring the greatest amount of power smoothly, they would need a hundred people.

In other words, for the enemy to invoke the three rounds of **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lightning), they would need at least ninety mage soldiers and at most three hundred of them.

But normally, with respect to the practice of Roland, the large scale magic squads are protected by four times more troops than the casters. Once the casters start to invoke the large scale magic, they will not be able to move for five minutes, and during that time, they will be completely defenseless, so in order to protect them, a substantial number of troops are needed.

In other words, on the other side of this open field, the number of Roland troops would number at least more than five hundred.

In the worst case, there could be a thousand people.

Of course, it was not a number that could be handled by just two people.

"Strategy?"

On hearing Ferris's words, Ryner nodded.

"I've got one."

"What should we do?"

"..... I'll tamper with the large scale magic on their side."

"Horh. So in other words..... we have to bust right into the enemy, and you'll forcibly change the magic formations made by the enemy?"

"Yes."

"While being completely surrounded by a ton of enemies, I shall hold them off while you change their magic formations right?"

"Yes."

"..... hm. I see. And, there's something I want to ask."

"What?"

"..... can you call that moronic strategy a strategy?"

Ryner smiled wryly at that question.

"..... yeah you can't call that a strategy at all. We might die. Then again, shall I think of another plan..... I'd rather just risk my own life, but to get you caught up in it....."

But Ferris said to that,

"But, there's no time to come up with another strategy right?"

To which Ryner nodded.

"While coming up with one, others will die."

"Then, we have no choice but to do it."

"..... yeah. Sorry."

"No need for apologies. In the worst case, I'll just abandon you and escape."

On hearing those words of hers,

"It'll be great if you can do that."

Said Ryner, but, *even though she said that, she won't just abandon me and escape, how troublesome*, he thought.

It was just as Kiefer had said.

There was no reason for Ryner to die here.

He could not succeed in his strategy all by himself. He would definitely need Ferris's cooperation.

However, if things come to a point where they can't do anything, Ferris will definitely.

"....."

She will definitely not abandon me and escape.

That's the type of person she is.

In other words, if Ryner were to die, Ferris would also die.

That would be terrible.

He didn't want that.

In other words, this time,

"..... I have to do my best....."

He moaned out.

He was exasperated at the fact that even though he had already been working hard up till here, but, why did he have to work even harder?

However, if he doesn't work even harder, he won't be able to protect the things that are important to him.

And they include Ferris, Kiefer, Iris, Kuku, Arua, Toale, and

also Sion.

So, even while feeling exasperated,

"....."

He looked ahead.

They were nearly upon the enemy.

As to the enemy numbers ---

"..... ah ~, that's around three thousand."

"Uhm."

"A few thousand more than what I've thought."

"A calculation error."

"Yeah. With the two of us, we can take on about twenty to thirty of them....."

She nodded. And for some reason, she looked delighted,

"..... in the past, we also charged into a swarm of troops before. This time round, let's do the same."

On hearing those words, a smile surfaced on him.

"Yeah ~, that incident huh."

And he recalled.

That was an incident which had taken place in Nelpha.

He had just met Ferris not long ago then.

It was an incident which had taken place when they were just starting to search for the Heroes' Relics, and had just entered

Nelpha from Roland.

The Nelpha troops had captured Milk, and they had gone to save her.

However, the enemy numbered fifty then. And it was tough even with just fifty of them. Rather, they were risking their lives there.

But the enemy numbered three thousand this time.

"..... somehow, I feel like running."

"The scared Ryner wants to call out to Mama while he pees in his pants huh?"

Ferris said lightly as usual, but Ryner nodded readily.

"Yeah, I'm about to. If the strategy fails, and if you were to die, I will definitely be unable to take it, and pee from my eyes. So....."

At that moment, he looked at her.

"So Ferris. If things become really bad, get away."

She then looked at him as well,

"..... uhm. You too....."

"Uhn."

"Then, let's go."

Upon saying that, Ferris sped up her horse even further.

At the same time, Roland completed its large scale magic attack.

It was **Raguru** (Lightning Falling Lightning).

And they fired it towards the Nelpha soldiers.

As they did so, a large scale magic for counteracting that was invoked from Nelpha.

Different from individual magic, one by one, three bouts of lightning that was powerful enough to blind the eyes were fired, but, they were received by a wall formed by large amounts of water erected by the Nelpha soldiers and rendered ineffective.

A buzz then started among the Roland soldiers. As Ryner expected, the enemy's attention was drawn to that wall of water. Nobody noticed their presence.

Looking at that,

"Let's go."

Upon saying that, Ryner spread the Roland flags. With that, he jumped off the horse, and charged into the Roland forces.

At that moment.

"W-What's happening?"

A person noticed him. And his face turned to one of surprise.

Ryner then showed the flag,

"I'm an ally. I carry an order from Field Marshal Claugh Klom from the south."

The soldier then started frantically,

"His Grace, Field Marshal Klom?"

"Yeah, that's right. It's an emergency. Who's the one commanding this force?"

As Ryner asked that, he tensed up a little.

It'll be bad if it's him, he thought.

That monster who was entirely covered in black, and a user of a Hero's Relic.

It'll be bad if it's Miran Froaude, he thought.

According to Shuss, currently, the ones attacking Runa were Lieutenant General Miran Froaude and, the former military man from the Kingdom of Estabul, Marshal Bayuuz White.

The one called White might be worse. While Ryner had never really met him before, he had heard from Sion that his ability is the real deal.

But the soldier said,

"The commander is Captain Terohm. He's right at the center."

Upon saying that, he pointed to behind him.

Ryner then,

"..... hm."

Sighed out softly.

It's not White nor Froaude. The two of them were probably with the main body.

With that, the situation was very much easier.

Ryner did not look in the direction where the soldier pointed. It was not like he had any business with the commander.

The ones whom he had business with were.

"....."

He looked at the left, right, center of the forces where new large scale magic were starting to get deployed.

The next spell they were invoking was once again **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs). The magic that was first used to burn the soldiers and commoners of Nelpha.

He would tamper with them.

Ryner pointed to the closest **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs) that was in the process of getting invoked to the right. Ferris then nodded.

At that moment, a number of soldiers started,

"Hey, don't you find it strange? Why aren't they wearing any military uniforms....."

However, without waiting for them to finish, the two of them started running.

Pushing through the soldiers, they dashed towards the **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs).

In the midst of that.

One of the soldiers looked at them,

"..... don't tell me they are enemies? Hey, report this to Captain Terohm....."

As the man was speaking, Ferris struck him down.

Seeing that, a number of soldiers said,

"Hey, did you see that!"

"It's the enemy!"

"The enemy has come!?"

While yelling that.

Ryner invoked his magic.

Drawing the magic inscription in the air at a high speed,

"WHAT I SEEK IS SILENCE >>> ANTE"

He murmured.

Instantly.

The sounds around them were gone.

With Ryner at the center, the sounds in the surrounding area were gone. A blanket of silence fell on them.

This is a simple magic that stops the vibration of the air and stops sounds from getting transmitted, however, when people are in a completely soundless environment, their hearts will become unsettled. Especially in the case of noisy battlefields.

Previously, when he used this magic against Nelpha soldiers, it caused a great panic among them. However, this time round, the reactions should be a little different.

The reason was because ---

"....."

The reason was because this was Roland's magic.

At that moment, sounds returned.

Immediately.

"What!? What's the meaning of this!? Someone extinguished the sounds!?"

"Who was the one who used Ante!"

A commotion started among the soldiers.

Gazing at that, Ryner started drawing another magic inscription. And then,

"WHAT I SEEK IS WATER MIST >>> MISUMI"

Instantly.

A large amount of water became a raging stream and rained upon the soldiers,

"I-It's the eneeeeeeeeemmmmyyyy!"

"No, wait! This is Roland's magic! It's a traitor! There's a traitor!"

This time round, a panic ensued.

And that's not the kind of panic caused by the desperate searching of the enemy. It was the kind of panic caused by the possibility of having everyone around oneself as an enemy.

And by that time, Ryner and Ferris had finally reached the invocation location of **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs).

Ferris drew her sword and started mowing down the mage soldiers who were casting **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs).

And as Ryner reached what was behind them,

"Now, here I go ~, ohrhya."

With a tremendous force, he started tampering with the **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs).

And around that time, the surrounding soldiers started realizing who the enemies were.

"Stop those two!"

With that yelling, a single person started drawing a magic inscription while facing them.

"I won't allow it."

Ferris beat him down with her sword.

Following that, a number of others drew their swords and came attacking her, but in an instant, they were sent sprawling onto the floor.

On top of that, a number of other soldiers drew their swords and came attacking Ryner,

"Damn."

Ferris said as she came back to him and somehow sent them flying.

But the enemy waves did not stop. A number of soldiers started drawing glowing magic inscriptions simultaneously.

Ferris frowned,

"Ryner!"

"Huh?"

"How long are you going to take?"

"Three minutes."

"Make it one."

"Impossible."

"Then, just hurry up and get on with it!"

While saying that, she jumped out again. After striking down one, two, three of the soldiers who had started inscribing magic circles, she returned to Ryner's side.

At the same time, the soldiers completed their magic.

Three bouts of **Kurenai**.

One **Kuuri**.

The streaking light of **Kuuri** that was fired off first was sliced apart by Ferris.

Following that, she snatched the Roland flags away from Ryner, knocked off some of the flaming shells from **Kurenai**, and repelled the rest with her sword ---

Then, in the nick of time, she jumped towards the last remaining flaming shell flying towards Ryner and.....

"..... gah."

She knocked it off with her bare hand.

Ferris's left arm got scorched and hung loosely. Unable to move.

"....."

"Ferris....."

Ryner uttered but,

"Don't worry about me, just finish what you need to do!"

She yelled angrily and jumped out again.

She then further went on to kick the face of a man who was about to start drawing a magic inscription, and swung her sword with just her right hand.

However, bit by bit, she was no longer able to defend against the enemy's attacks.

And Ferris's body became,

"....."

Covered in blood.

"..... damn, damn, what am I doing..... faster, I need to finish this faster....."

While saying that, Ryner hastened his hand.

He couldn't go help her. He wouldn't be able to do much by helping her.

That's why he stopped looking at her.

The last time his eyes were on her, she was cut by a sword from behind. She couldn't dodge that. Blood was spurting. Her cries of anguish could be heard.

But, even so, Ryner did not go help her. He merely,

"..... please..... please, don't die, Ferris!"

Yelled as he focused on the magic inscriptions before him.

And continued tampering with its composition. With an abnormal fast speed, he changed the structure of the complex

puzzle that was constructed by many people.

A little bit more.

"I just have a little bit more, so Ferris! Keep on going!"

At the same time he shouted that, he completed it. In the center of that large scale magic's giant inscription, which could not have been drawn by a single person, on the platform, a billow of black smoke formed, and the smoke spread to the surroundings in just a moment.

Then, it penetrates into the magic inscriptions of the other **ligisu** (Flaming Crimson Fangs) that were concurrently in the process of getting invoked, and altered their structure.

What was invoked was a little curse. A curse that stopped the activity of the spirits in this area.

With this, for the next fifteen minutes, it would not be possible to use any magic near these magic inscriptions.

And this was not the magic of Roland. Rather, it was not a magic of any country. This was a special magic that Ryner had researched for the past few years, that's why, once again, unable to comprehend what was happening, panic descended upon the Roland soldiers.

At any rate, they could not use magic.

On the battlefield, if they could not use magic, they would not be able to pursue their enemies.

In the next fifteen minutes.

The Nelpha soldiers would have an overwhelming advantage.

Since Ryner had invoked that magic,

"..... I'm done! Now, let's get out of here, Ferris!"

He turned around to look for her.

However.

"....."

Covered entirely with blood, Ferris was on her knees.

Her entire body was full of wounds. Blood flowing. Even on her face. Even on her abnormally well-featured, beautiful face, there were wounds.

She looked at him.

She looked at him with a troubled face.

Then.

"..... I'm sorry, Ryner. I'm dy....."

At that moment, from beside her, a sword was about to swing down. As if to behead her, a sword was about to swing down.

Seeing that.

"....."

Seeing that,

"Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh!?"

Ryner broke into a sprint.

But, his movements were terribly slow. Due to the magic invoked by Ryner which stopped the activity of all spirits, the acceleration magic which he had cast on himself had been terminated.

It seemed like he couldn't make it. Even while the sword was about to swing down on Ferris's neck, it seemed like he couldn't make it.

But, still, Ryner ran. With everything he got.

And he jumped.

He jumped into the space between the sword and Ferris and embraced her.

Instantly, the enemy's sword slashed deep into his left shoulder and struck his bone. And he was sent flying from the pain and impact. His left arm could no longer move.

But he did not let go of Ferris. While hugging her, he fell onto the ground.

She then looked up at him, and following that, looked at his slashed left shoulder.

"A-Are you an idiot!? What the hell are you doing!? Y-You..... want to die!?"

As she said that, Ryner carried her and started running again.

"T-That's..... my line, idioooooooottttttttt!"

He hollered.

With his face on the verge of tears, he looked intently at her,

"Uwaaahhhh, that was close! I thought you were going to die! I thought you were going to die! And cut it out already! Do you really want to die so badly! Didn't you say that you'll run away when it looks like you're going to die! But yet, why were you still guarding me while you were on the verge of dying! Didn't I tell you that if you were to die..... if you were to die, I'll cry! Don't shit with me, jeez!"

He yelled uncontrollably with anger, and embraced her strongly.

"....."

She looked up in a dumbfounded manner, and for some reason, her face turned red. It's probably because she lost too much blood and was gradually weakening, he thought.

With a troubled face that appeared to be red from blushing, she said,

"..... ah? Errmm, don't..... don't get so angry, Ryner."

"Of course I'm angry."

"I-Is that so..... sorry."

"This is not something you can just make up by apologizing!"

"Uuu? Then, what should I do.....?"

While running, Ryner said to that.

"That'd of course be to live on and get out of here. The two of us. We can't become, we can't become sacrifices in some godforsaken place....."

But, at that moment, Ryner's words stopped. A number of enemies were again upon them.

However, the Ferris who Ryner was carrying, swung her sword with her still movable right hand and mowed them down.

Ryner then said,

"Oh, that's pretty good."

"Umu."

"With this, it seems like we can still go on. Can you continue moving your right hand for a while?"

A weak smile then surfaced on her,

"Who do you think I am?"

"A troublesome rampaging dango girl."

"I'm going to kill you."

"Save that for later. If we survive, I'll let you kill me as much as you want later..... well, shall we go?"

Ryner asked, to which,

"Uhm."

Ferris nodded.

And the two of them started making their escape with everything they got.

While Ferris, who was carried by Ryner, was mowing down the enemies, they moved straight on.

Most of the enemies around them had already realized where they were. Rather, that commander called Terohm or Parohm, well, forget about the name; he should already have realized where they were.

Gradually, groups of the enemies came.

If this were to continue, they would definitely be killed.

He thought.

They couldn't make it.

They couldn't reach the place where they had left their horses earlier.

Just as he was thinking about that.

"....."

The enemy's attacks stopped.

With the yell from a soldier, the enemy's attacks stopped.

That soldier had yelled out,

"Ne-Nelpha is launching a large scale attackkkkkkk."

On hearing that, the eyes which had been trained on Ryner and Ferris turned together towards where the Nelpha forces were.

There, gigantic flames were gathering.

Massive flames used for slaughter were gathering.

Ryner's eyes widened.

Nelpha was about to launched their large scale magic here.

And there were around ten bouts of them.

Someone shouted.

"Deploy a counter magic!"

Someone shouted.

"Why!? Why doesn't our magic activate!?"

Someone cried out tearfully.

"Are we going to be killed!? Are we all going to die!?"

With that, terror descended upon the Roland soldiers, and completely ignoring Ryner and Ferris, they started making their escape.

No, Ryner also had to get away. The current wounded Ryner and Ferris wouldn't be able to dodge that many rounds of large scale magic attacks.

This was the worst possible situation.

It was a good thing if they were not to get killed by Roland's soldiers, but at this rate, it was not unlikely for them to get killed by their own allies, Nelpha's soldiers.

To get cornered into such a pressing situation.

"....."

But a frail smile surfaced on Ryner. He was looking at Nelpha's large scale attack magic which was quickly being deployed with his **Alpha Stigma** eyes.

It was a strange type of magic.

For some reason, it was a somewhat strange magic that

appeared to be a combination of Roland and Nelpha's magic technology.

On top of that, the magic merely had a flashy appearance; the truth was that flames were not going to come flying towards here, and no attacks were going to come, they were merely flashy balls of fire.

In other words, what Nelpha was invoking now was magic for the purpose of threatening Roland.

A total deception magic, whereby two or three invocations could be performed by merely ten casters.

"....."

However, that alone had a tremendous effect. To the unsettled Roland soldiers who were not able to use any magic, upon seeing that fake large scale attack magic, everyone of them started retreating.

Looking at that.

Looking at that magic made up of a combination of Roland and Nelpha magic, Ryner smiled wryly.

"..... damn. We got saved by Arua....."

The only person who could do that was him.

Using the casters of Nelpha, by intermingling with Roland's magic, through improvisation, he devised a new type of magic.

That was a capability which could only exist in an **Alpha Stigma** bearer, who could read the construct of a magic and use it immediately.

And on top of that, to do it at this kind of timing.

After seeing Ryner invoked a magic used for disabling the use of magic, Arua had activated that large scale magic used for threatening Roland's troops.

He was probably looking at them all this while with his **Alpha Stigma**.

In order to save Ryner.

In order to save Ferris.

As kids, you'll just get in the way!, he wanted to brush him off, but yet, in the end, at the most crucial moment, he was saved by him.

He smiled,

"..... seems like he has grown a lot..... I have to praise him later....."

Upon saying that, they reached the horses which they had ridden earlier. And while carrying Ferris, he mounted on one of them. Immediately after that, he galloped off.

There were no longer any Roland soldiers around them. They had all started retreating.

That was the right move, he thought. If they could not understand the situation they were in, they should retreat. On one hand they could not use any magic, on the other hand, the enemy appeared to be about to use a large scale attack magic on them, then they should just escape from the range of the enemy's magic for now.

To have as few casualties as possible --- that was the right decision. The commander here appeared to be pretty capable, he thought.

And once again, Ryner thought,

..... fortunately, the commander is not Froaude.

If it were him, then he might not care about the lives of his allies, and proceed on to attack. After all, the soldiers here were meant to delay the enemy. And even if all his troops were to die, he would continue to attack to slow down the enemy.

If that were to happen, all of Ryner's plans would have been thwarted.

However, the result this time,

"..... it's our win. We managed to buy time."

It was largely a meaningful thing.

For what reason did Roland send a group of soldiers to slow them down? It was easy if one thought about it.

If they didn't come to slow them down, then Roland wouldn't be able to catch up to the Nelpha forces who already had started moving.

In other words, if the delaying attack on Nelpha's soldiers this time round failed, then it meant that the situation had turned favorable.

They had managed to buy time to escape.

Ryner then said,

"..... ahh, somehow, this is really tiring."

As the horse galloped on.

Upon saying that, in front of him, Ferris, who was sitting facing

him, looked up,

"Uhm. Thanks to your thoughtless plan, our bodies and heart are in shambles....."

As she said that, she suddenly had a 'that's it!' face,

"Th-Thanks to your violent behavior after getting drunk, my body and heart are in shambles! I'll sue you! I'll definitely sue you! And thus, the trial starts..... cough cough....."

In the midst of saying all that, she started coughing.

Ryner then frantically said,

"Jeeeezz, don't start spouting nonsense when you have all those wounds."

While saying that, he stroked her back. Ferris then made a unsatisfied face.

Looking at that, Ryner smiled faintly. Even as he smiled, his shoulder hurt, but compared to Ferris's wounds, this pain didn't bother him.

Looking at her bloodied body, he said softly,

"..... damn. I'm sorry."

"Hn?"

"Nothing."

"What?"

"Nothing, I said. It's just that, after having put you through this much this time, I was thinking of giving you a dango treat."

On hearing his words.

"....."

She stared intently at Ryner for some reason, and said.

"Hey Ryner. Don't be too conceited."

She said all of a sudden.

"Huh?"

Ryner then said. Unable to understand her words, he was a little bewildered.

She was still staring at him.

And then, she said. With a somewhat angry voice,

"..... whatever others may think, my wounds are not the fault of yours. The deaths of the Nelpha's commoners are not the fault of yours. So what's with that apologetic look? Are you omnipotent and right in everything, and will always succeed? Are you God? Stop getting conceited. You've already more than done your best. For a useless scumbag who only attacks girls night after night, you've already done your best. So be proud of yourself. Don't make such a face. Don't talk about treating me to dango, fool. Understand?"

Ferris said all of a sudden.

To that, Ryner.

"....."

Couldn't say a thing. He could only look at her with a surprised face.

But Ferris buried her face into Ryner's chest,

"That's all I wanted to say. I'm going to sleep. I'm a little tired."

"Ah, er~m, ok. I got it. Wait, you....."

But, she immediately said,

"Ah, but I think it's better to treat me dango anyway. Ok, I'm sleeping. I'll leave the rest to you."

Without saying anything further to Ryner, she lost consciousness. Her strength left her and she started to fall off the horse,

"Owah, crap."

Ryner frantically caught her. However, she did not react to his touch at all. She was really covered with terrible wounds. He had to link up with the Nelpha troops quickly and render medical aid to her.

But yet.

"....."

Even when she was covered with such terrible wounds, she was still worried about others like a fool.

Even when she always had a serious face while acting violently and causing trouble to others, at such a time, she only worried about others.

Ryner then,

"....."

Wanted to say something to Ferris.

He wanted to say something softly to Ferris, and at that moment.

Suddenly, the light started to disappear.

"Wha....."

Ryner was surprised.

That was not a metaphor, but truly, all the light of this world was disappearing as if it was being sucked away by something.

The sky, the atmosphere, the land, swiftly before his eyes, the light disappeared and the world was plunged into darkness.

A dizzying darkness.

And then, that darkness ---

"Don't tell me....."

Ryner knew of that darkness.

But that shouldn't be. If that was really the thing that Ryner knew of, then things had become troublesome.

No, not just troublesome.

Rather, it was the worst possible situation.

But clearly, that was the thing that Ryner knew of.

It was the same scene when the necklace Hero's Relic, which he and Ferris had gotten hold of while they were visiting Runa, went on a rampage.

The light disappeared from the world.

The light disappeared from the world.

And the light gathered behind Ryner.

In the direction where the Roland soldiers were running away, the light was sucked towards there and gathered.

He turned around.

And looked.

"....."

He looked at the intense bright light gathering at a distance away behind him.

Ryner had seen that before.

It was indeed the same gathering of light by that necklace in Runa.

Looking at that, Ryner trembled.

"..... you're kidding me."

Murmuring that, Ryner trembled.

That light gradually enlarged as it gathered the surrounding power.

Last time, when the light burst off and unleashed its power outwards, the scenery had changed entirely.

An entire mountain was leveled from the abnormally powerful light.

But, the necklace had disappeared at the same time. For some reason, once it was used, it would disappear it seemed, and Ryner had used it by mistake, and should not have brought it back to Roland.

But yet.

"....."

Why did Roland have it?

And why did they use that abnormal power against humans?

That's not something one should use against humans right?

That is.....

That power is.....

"..... what in the world does Roland..... what in the world does Sion want to do....."

But, in the next instant.

The world was bathed in light, the darkness sundered.

He could not see anything.

He could not dodge.

Ryner could only stand there, stunned at the end of everything.

And everything ended.

"....."

Ryner opened his blinded eyes.

The land beside him started hollowing.

Away from Roland, along the direction towards the Nelpha soldiers, the land started hollowing.

The scale of the destruction was smaller than the time Ryner

invoked the necklace. It might be another type of the same relic perhaps.

But still, even so.

"....."

Even so, that was not a power to be used by humans.

"....."

Ryner turned around.

The thirty thousand over Nelpha soldiers and commoners who were running away was down by a third.

The rest had died.

In that instant just now.

With just a burst of light, over ten thousand people had died.

And.

"....."

And, Kiefer and the rest might have been among those.

Iris, Toale, Arua, Kuku, might have gotten caught up in it.

On seeing that.

On seeing that,

"..... y-you're kidding me."

Ryner started urging his horse forward.

"..... this must be a joke, a joke, a joooooooooooooooooookkkkkkkkeeeeeeeee."

Towards where Kiefer and the rest were. Towards his comrades, Ryner urged his horse to gallop at full speed.

However, once again.

The light started disappearing from the world again.

The light was stolen from the sky, the atmosphere, the land, and darkness started to spread.

Ryner turned around.

He glared at a distant place where the light was being sucked towards.

Then.

"..... d-don't shit with me..... don't shit with me Sion!! What the hell is this. What the hell is this! I didn't write that report for this purpose! I didn't gather the relics for this purpose!!"

He hollered.

But that voice reached no one.

That voice did not reach his best friend.

Since he was too far away.

Since the path he tread on was far too different.

The light just gradually disappeared.

The light just gradually disappeared.

And the light of despair gathered at Roland's side.

The immensely huge destructive power that could take away thousands, tens of thousands of lives gathered at Roland's side.

The next time when this were to be unleashed, it would probably wipe out nearly all the humans.

Adults, children, men, women, everything would be erased into oblivion.

Everything would go to nothingness.

It was like the lightning of God.

It was like the flames of the Devil.

It was not the power of a human. Such a power was not a power used by humans.

But, Roland was using that power.

Sion was using that power.

It was like God passing His divine judgement.

It was like the Devil using a forbidden power.

"Why..... why did it come to this? Why did it turn out like this?"

Ryner could only murmur while on the verge of tears.

At his own powerlessness.

At his own worthlessness.

There was nothing he could do.

The **Alpha Stigma** is unable to see the construct of a **Hero's Relic**. He could come up with no countermeasure.

But, death was definitely near.

A certain death was near.

The gathering of light was done.

"..... please stop."

But the despair didn't stop.

"..... I beg you, please stop."

But the darkness didn't stop.

And once again, across the surroundings of Ryner, the light flashed.....

Shrouding everything in despair ---

In that very instant.

"..... wah ~, seems like you are really in a dire situation, Ryner-san. If I save you guys here, I should become popular with little girls as well as mature women right?"

A light-hearted voice sounded suddenly from beside him.

"Huh?"

Ryner turned towards the voice.

But, just in the instant he was turning, the light from the necklace of Roland burst forth.

And Ryner could only say,

"Crap....."

But, at that moment,

"Horh. It seems like Roland is using **Ellearms** (Demonic Beast Destroyer). Then we shall use this.

--- devour and disperse that light, **Euloss Elma** (Divine Parasite Bugs)."

Instantly.

From beside Ryner, for some reason, the sounds of countless insect wings could be heard, flickering in seven colors, fluorescent-glowing tiny bugs appeared and flew ahead.

They probably numbered in tens of millions.

Like a swarm of locusts, the flickering bugs filled the sky in a moment, and collided against the light unleashed by Roland.

At that moment.

<< Kyukyukyukyukyukyukyukyukyukya
----------!? >>

From the tens of millions of the insects, ear-splitting screeches started filling their ears, and then.

And then, they started devouring the light.

"W-What....."

Upon seeing that abrupt bizarre scene, Ryner could only utter that.

But, before his eyes, it unfolded.

The tens of millions of flickering bugs devoured the light, completely devoured, completely devoured, as they advanced.

The bugs devoured the divine lightning unleashed by Roland, and before long, everything disappeared.

The light did not reach here.

They were saved. Without anyone dying, the light was devoured by the bugs and disappeared.

But, what on earth.

"What on earth was that?"

Immediately after Ryner said that.

<< Kyukya ----------!?
>>

The bugs screeched loudly, in an ear-deafening manner.

"Uwah."

Ryner groaned as he covered his ears.

Before his eyes, the bugs spun around in circles. As if they were looking for prey. As if they were looking for the next sacrifice.

No prey?

No other prey?

And after circling for a while, they turned around. And with that. They started moving towards Ryner.

"..... d-don't tell me now they want to eat us....."

Ryner said, and once again,

"No way. They don't like human flesh."

The voice sounded again.

Ryner remembered that voice. That's right. All this while, since the pressing situation earlier, he felt that someone was speaking to him. On top of that, he seemed to recall hearing that voice before.

"W-Who is it?"

Sitting on top of his horse, Ryner looked at his surroundings.

But there was no one.

Some distance away, he could see the Nelpha soldiers and the commoners, but he didn't feel that the voice had come from there.

Then, where on earth.....

At that moment.

"No no, lower your line of sight a little, Ryner-san."

On hearing those words, Ryner dropped his gaze. And before he knew it, there was a smiling young man standing there.

A single young man who seemed to be around thirteen, fourteen years of age.

With beautiful black hair, and intelligent looking black eyes. A beautiful young man who was wearing an outfit that resembled the clothes of a Miko.

Looking at his face.

And the face surfaced from his memories,

"Y-You..... aren't you Vois!?""

Shouted Ryner.

He knew that young man.

The name of the young man is Vois Fiurelle.

While Ryner and Ferris were searching for Heroes' Relics, after passing through Nelpha and Runa, they met him at their last stop, in the country of the Iyet Republic.

And in that Iyet Republic, this fella reigned like a king.

"....."

No, rather than a king, it is more apt to describe him as the head of a mafia.

Despite being a brat, he is the head of the Fiurelle Group that forcefully governed a country with power and information.

Every time he saw him, he was always exploding with Hentai tendencies, a troublesome fellow creating plenty of troublesome matters, a fellow who numbered first in the ranking list of the people he didn't want to meet, but, when the Iyet Republic crumbled from the rampaging of a Hero's Relic, he disappeared.

That's why he had not seen him for the past year.

But that same Vois was before him right now.

As he looked at Vois's face, Ryner said.

"W-What did you do just now?"

And Vois replied.

"What, you say, Ryner-san, I'm here to save you..... ah, do you want to thank me? That's it isn't it? It's only right to show gratitude when receiving favors from someone. This is just basic manners right. Is ok right? To give me around twenty cute girls....."

"HEY, aren't you the same as before!"

Vois then said happily.

"Ryner-san, I'm so happy to see your usual Hentai antics. Ferris-san seems to be full of wounds! Your bedroom play sure is intense as usual....."

"What the hell are you talking abooooouuuuttttttttttt!"

Ryner hollered at Vois, who was full of his usual antics.

Vois then smiled cheerfully, and said,

"Well, we shall save our reunion for now....."

Upon saying that, he reached into his bosom. And took out something resembling a necklace.

A necklace with a scarlet orb.

Upon seeing that necklace,

"Uwah."

Ryner uttered without thinking.

The reason was because, that necklace was clearly that.

The one Ryner saw in Runa.

The necklace that has an extraordinary destructive power.

Grasping that necklace, like a child, a smile surfaced on Vois,

"Let's finish our work for now, Ryner-san. Let's kill everyone in the direction of Roland. It's troubling that they have gotten hold of something like **Ellearms** (Demonic Beast Destroyer). Let's kill them first and we'll talk later....."

As he said that, he held out the necklace.....

"Hey, wait a minuteeeeeeeeeee!"

Ryner snatched away the necklace.

Then,

"You, what the hell are you trying to do?"

"Huh? I'm just trying to teach the arrogant Roland to know their place. Now, hand that back please. Then, I'll just kill them all in a blink....."

"No, like I said, you can't!"

On hearing Ryner's yell, Vois cocked his head incredulously.

"What do you mean by I can't?"

"Killing! Isn't it terrible to just kill them like insects?"

But Vois's face just became more and more bewildered at his words,

"Huh? What on earth are you talking about, Ryner-san? This is war you know? It's about killing each other. If we don't kill, we'll get killed. Am I wrong?"

On hearing that sensible rebuttal, which was unthinkable to have come from a brat, Ryner said,

"Ah, no, that's true, but..... but....."

"Alright alright, since you got it, let's kill them first then talk. Please give me back the necklace."

"No no, like I said, you can't do that. Especially with regards to using this necklace that's embedded with such an insane power, that's a definite no no. If we use such a thing to wage a war, it will just end up dreadfully with both sides in despair....."

Said Ryner.

Rather, that should be obviously a no-brainer.

It was an enormous power that was unattainable through the intellect of Man. It was an abnormally mysterious power to the extent which no one knows how to activate nor stop. If that were to be used in wars, the end result would definitely be the worst possible one.

Countries getting wiped out, no, perhaps the entire world would be wiped out. What would be left would just be dead bodies and despair. To wage a war using that, was too much of a foolish thing.

That was what Ryner thought, but,

"....."

As expected, Vois's face clearly showed that he did not comprehend.

On realizing that, he made an exasperated face,

"..... aah well, forget that. More importantly, why have you come here? Did you really come to save me?"

To that question, Vois promptly replied,

"You won't be getting any free help from me. That's the teaching of the Fiurelle family."

On hearing those words, Ryner frowned,

"..... you really haven't changed..... then why are you saving me? In the first place, where have you been and what have you been up to all this while, and what did you come here for?"

After saying that, Ryner looked intently at the necklace that he had snatched away.

The swarm of bugs which had been flying in mid-air earlier probably belonged to him as well.

Both items were clearly Heroes' Relics.

What has he been using these for all this while, and what did he come here for?

Ryner glared at him, but, with his childish face, a cruel smile surfaced as he said.

Looking straight at him.

"No, I just came here to give a somewhat interesting suggestion."

"Suggestion?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Vois's intelligent looking eyes narrowed further. Then,

"No, well, it's not something that I have to stand on ceremony about. The truth is, Ryner-san, I was thinking of having you become the King."

He said.

Ryner's eyes widened,

"Haah? King? Hey, what the hell....."

But Vois cut him off.

His eyes became narrower, until his eyes could hardly be seen, and he smiled.

"..... I was thinking of having you become the King of the Anti-Roland Coalition which I've created....."

At the same time he said those words.

Vois raised up his hand.

At his signal, all of a sudden, a little further away from where the soldiers and commoners of Nelpha were, a few hundred soldiers wearing strange armor appeared.

Not the brown armor of Nelpha, not the white armor of Roland, but pitch black armor.

Ryner looked at those soldiers,

"..... what's that?"

To those words, Vois smiled again.

"Like I said, they are the Anti-Roland Coalition forces. I've put it together in this one year. Well, in name, it's actually a force built with the small country in the southeast part of the central continent, Belis, as its center, but I'm the one who holds the

true authority over it. So, right now, three countries have joined the Anti-Roland Coalition, and I'm seeking out the Autonomous Holy City of Cassla, which is the strategic point for stopping Roland from swallowing up Central Menoris, as its fourth member....."

In the midst of his proclamation,

"Hey wait a minute wait a minute! Huh? Eeh? What the hell are you talking about? You've made the Anti-Roland Coalition?"

Vois promptly nodded,

"Yes."

Ryner had an increasingly bewildered expression,

"For what purpose?"

Once again, a smile surfaced on Vois. An increasingly cruel, inhumane, cold smile surfaced,

"..... that's simple. Because the world needs it."

"Aah? The world? What the hell are you talking about? About the world needing the Anti-Roland Coalition?"

On hearing Ryner's question, Vois shook his head. And he said in a low, cold voice.

"That's not it. What is needed is the power to kill the cursed monster called Sion Astal. The power to destroy the mad sword known as Lucile Eris. Right now, the world doesn't want a hero king. It doesn't want a Sion Astal. The world doesn't want that mad demon. Excessively tremendous power, and overly huge ambitions, are hindrances. That's why I have come to pick you up. I've come to pick up the one that has the

power to kill him, you. Now, let's kill him together. Let's kill that mad devil. He's the one who will topple the world's balance. He's the one who will take away the light from everything.

But, that cannot be forgiven.

The **Goddesses** cannot forgive that.

So Ryner-san, join up with me. No, that's not it. I'll follow you. I'll lend you a hand. So, by your hand..... by the hand of his best friend....."

Vois said as he held out his hand with his usual grinning, cheerful face.

"..... please kill Sion Astal with your hand."

He said.

"....."

But Ryner frowned.

His face contorted.

For some reason, Vois's words made the depths of his heart feel hollow.

However, that was not because of the fact that he was told to kill Sion. It's not because of the fact that Sion was called the

mad devil. Even though he was bothered by what Vois had said all of a sudden. Rather, he was bothered by what what was happening in the central part of the continent.

But, those were not at the top of his mind right now.

The only word which made Ryner's chest hollow.

A word which made Ryner feel terribly, terribly, terribly unpleasant.

He thought about it.

That word from Vois which made him feel nauseous.

Goddesses.

Just by hearing that word, Ryner could no longer move. Even though it wasn't a word that was out of the ordinary, nor did it bear any particular connection, but yet, Ryner could no longer move.

"W-What in the world....."

He said in a groaning tone. But his voice was also trembling. Trembling uncontrollably.

He could no longer think of anything else.

Only the word **Goddesses** kept reverberating in his head.

Goddesses.

Goddesses.

Goddesses.

The word reverberated in his head.

Goddesses.

Goddesses.

Goddesses.

The word resounded in his heart.

A surge of nauseousness.

A surge of anxiety.

What on earth is this?

What the hell is this?

Goddesses.

Goddesses.

Goddesses.

And at that moment.

"Aah, they are here."

Said Vois.

And at his feet.

In his shadow extended by the moonlight, a creepiness started moving.

Ryner looked down at them. He could tell from his instinct that something that was terribly awful was about to rise up.

But, he couldn't move. He couldn't move for some reason. The only thing he could move were his eyes. Only cursed eyes

which were overlaid with bright red pentacles.

Only his eyes were resisting something.

Only his eyes were resisting some power.

Ryner looked at Vois's shadow with his cursed eyes. He could see something squirming in that shadow. Something black. No, something darker than black.

"..... what on earth..... what on earth are you talking about? They? **Goddesses**? What on earth, are you....."

But at that moment.

Ryner's words stopped.

Suddenly, in his head,

<< Prostrate, worm. >>

A voice descended into his head.

On hearing that voice,

"..... uwah."

Ryner groaned out softly, and fell off the horse. Together with Ferris. She was unconscious. As he attempted to help her up, once again,

<< Prostrate, worm. >>

The voice descended upon him.

It was like the voice of a god.

It was like the holler of a devil.

Reacting to that voice, his body started moving on its own. Ryner squatted down onto the ground, and then prostrated. His face pressed painfully against the ground.

He couldn't resist.

He couldn't resist at all. His entire body was dominated by that voice, as if he was a puppet that was being manipulated, his body moved on its own.

What the hell!?

What the hell just happened!?

He cried out silently.

The only things he could move were his eyes.

His own cursed eyes.

But with those eyes. Those eyes that were glowing bright red like the color of blood, with those glowing pentacles that seemed to be resisting against everything in this world, he looked at Vois.

No, he looked at the black shadows at Vois's feet.

Then, from inside the shadow --- it came out.

The owner of the voice.

The owner of the voice that sounded like a god, crept out of that darkness which was darker than black, and deeper than the abyss.

Ryner looked at that.

Ryner looked at that.

And then.

"....."

Ryner looked straight at that figure.

"....."

And cried out in anguish.

Afterword

Geez, I'm so busy!

So busy!

What am I busy with? Thanks to the mischief from a cat, I'm busy with buying a new car to replace my destroyed car..... my bishoujo editor-in-charge went "Write the damn manuscript, heeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy ☆"

Erm, I'm writing.

I'm writing you know!

And so ~.

This is Kagami, who's desperately writing the manuscripts for the afterword and the short story to be used for the awakening campaign present which is already due in the very same morning, among other things.

The truth is today,

"I-I-I'm sorry, for some reason, whether it is because I'm in a slump, or a trump, or due to my relatives' misfortune which were not, there's no manuscript[4]..... won't you extend the deadline? Ah, of course, it's not because I couldn't sleep from the excitement of buying a new car you know, really you know?"

Of course I can't possibly have such a phone conversation.

Because today!

Today there's a meeting in the editorial department on the plans for Toyota-san's interview and Denyuuden comic to be used for the July issue of DM alrightttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt ---

A ad on the comic adaptation of Denyuuden! (LOL)

Well --- so joyous.

Toyota-san already has a 4-koma, and following behind, the plans for a comic adaptation of Denyuuden has started.

Even though I don't know how the world of Denyuuden will be drawn, but since there's going to be a presentation done by the editorial department, I can't possibly go there with a sullen face as a result of not meeting my deadline, so consequently, I woke up at five in the morning to write this afterword.

The sun hasn't come out yet.

Well, the details about this book have already been revealed, I think.

Erm, anyway, before that, as usual.

"Dai Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu 3 The Great Plan Of The Azure Breath"

How's it?

This is how I've been starting afterwords all this while. Why do I always use so much space, well, the afterwords space this time is not half-assed.

My editor-in-charge told me that there will be 13 pages for the afterword.

But since I can't write 13 pages, I think I will use up all my energy halfway, but I'll do my best!

Please support me!

I shall proceed the use up the space extravagantly.

Afterword Part 2

Once again, how did you find "Daidenyuuden 3"?

Of course, those who have already read this should know by now, this time round, we have a serious volume that we have never had before.

A volume in which Ryner's perspective changed greatly.

A volume in which his burdens changed greatly.

On top of that, right from the start, it was climax after climax, to the reader, it might be kind of an extremely fast paced development, are you guys alright with this?

Even my bishoujo editor-in-charge K-san has commented that, *the development in this volume is fast*, and

"You take it slowly next volume you know!"

In Denyuuden, this kind of rare (LOL) developments might be strangely fast, but, for the rest of Daidenyuuden, it will be along these lines.

There are still many things to do to tie up the last part of the plot tightly.

Everyone, please continue to support this ongoing avalanche!

And so, next.

Editor K-san said,

"Anyway, just write about this in the afterwordddddddddddddddddd ☆"

To me and regarding the promotion.

Right now.

Inside the Dragon Magazine which has just undergone a renewal, is the once only revival of Denyuuden!

And it's going to be launched on the same day as this book, on May 20!

Denyuuden revives with its cover and opening special.

The cover appears to be demon king Ryner.

I haven't seen it myself yet, but the editorial department has judged the dark Ryner to be cool.

You, who are reading this book from the afterword in the bookstore.

Buy the Doramaga at the magazine corner as well! (LOL)

By the way, about the short story in the Doramaga --- then again, I wrote so much that it can't be called a short story though ---

What!

Seems like the contents are a rough continuation of "Dai Denyuuden 3". In the long chapter, the contents are pretty much crossovers.

Frankly, a long chapter is installed.

The core of the mystery behind Denyuuden, even I was trembling, completely moved to tears!

Me and my editor-in-charge, we would never have thought that the mystery will be unveiled in Doramaga! Wait, is this really ok? Is this really ok? The two of us moved to tears over the phone.

Those who are interested, please do buy it, read it, and send in the questionnaire.

Next, I shall tell you about the details of the Denyuuden manga adaptation, which I still know nothing about, as well as the Denyuuden Great Special Edition, lots of info, so please read on!

Denyuuden will probably not revive in Doramaga again except for occasionally, so this is valuable!

The symbol is Demon King Ryner.

Please support me!

That's what my editor-in-charge told me and that's all I have to write.

But still, there's something I need to go back to.

Umu.

13 pages is sure long ---.

Ah, that reminds me, I have to say thanks with regards to "The Legend of the Fallen Black Hero" where Sion is the protagonist.

For some reason, the "Ochiden" series has sold more than the already published "Toriden".

Normally, for a book, it definitely won't go past the accumulated numbers for the previous volume, but, maybe it's because from hereon, "Ochiden" will starting the Roland Revolution chapter, so it might feel like a new series, and with everyone's support, this impossible miracle has been accomplished.

Not just a volume before, but even two volumes before, super surprised.

Well, the truth is, I was really afraid. Since last time, the ad for the post "Toriden" series, "Denyuuden SHOW" was done, I forcibly pulled the plug on it and said I want to do the revolution chapter! Let's do "Ochiden"! I was really getting

ahead of myself and trembling.

Thanks to everyone's encouragement, the higher ups answered to my willfulness and the editorial department and sales department even held a strategic meeting and many others really worked hard, and somehow I managed to get on this track.

That's why, together with the protagonist of Ochiden, Sion-kun, let us say our thanks.

Thank you.

So, please continue to support Daiden and Ochiden.

I ended it beautifully.

There are still enough pages left to kill me! (CRY)

I'm sorry to put in ads.

I shall continue to work hard.

Shall I write about my recent situation?

Speaking of recent situation, I've never written that many manuscripts before. I've been writing and writing. But writing manuscripts is normal, so I'll talk about something else.

I wrote about cars and cats in the opening section, erm, what's next?

Recently, at my workplace at 11.30pm, my fellow authors asked me to go to a Hanami. (By the way, I was writing this afterword during the Hanami season).

So on that night,

"Oh ~ little Taka."

And I was already having a sleepy face.

"Uwah, I'm already so sleepy and going to go back, and you called me?"

"No no, the night is still young right?"

"No, I want to go back already."

"Me too."

"Me three."

"Then don't call me during this houuurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr."

I yelled out, but in the end, everyone got along till morning.

No one appeared at the workplace the next morning.

Well, as expected, work can only get done at the workplace! (LOL)

So, that's how I have fun in the workplace, together with four authors from Fujimi, and four authors from Dengeki.

Initially, there were only three of us, and before I knew it, it became like that.

Being an author can be a lonely thing, and when from the seat beside or the seat aside comes,

"Uwah ~, I want to die ~"

I don't feel that lonely anymore.

If you want to know about this, I've uploaded it in my homepage, Kagami Takaya's healthy lifestyle.

Somehow, I managed to finished 80% of the pages ~.

Time to go into the summing up!

By the way, if I don't conclude this soon, I won't make it in time for the next manuscript!

The deadline for this is one hour later!

Shall I end this with a short section!?

So, that's how it feels like, I'm tying things up.

But, before I conclude, there's something I always say.

Everyone, thank you as always.

With this volume, counting Elwin, Denyuuden, Kagami Takaya has written 39 books.

The next one will be the 40th!

Even though I felt like I've been swept to here, but the reason for that is because of everyone's encouragement.

A work can't be established without its readers. So really, thank you.

And to the bookstore peeps, thank you.

I've seen those signages.

As well as the displays of the books.

I'm amazed each time.

It's not just my effort, but everyone else, that this work can continue.

Thank you.

And, please continue to support me!

And somehow, as I'm writing this, the truth is, the editorial department has already sent me the manga adaptation as a present ~.

Information about the manga adaptation.

In July issue of the monthly Dragon Age (selling on 9-June (Monday)), an announcement comic for "Denyuuden" will be in!

In the August issue of Dragon Age, (selling on 9-July (Wednesdat)), the manga "Denyuuden" will start serialization!

The manga artist will be Nagakura Hiroko-san. At this point of time, I've not met him yet, but the Age editorial department sent me the drawings, the rough, and the name[5].

Somehow. It's awesoooooommmmeeee!

The drawings, the name as well! I've seen the serious scenes of the long chapters, and it's really awesome!

On top of that, he sent his gratitude and about how much he likes Denyuuden, so everyone, please look forward to it!

So, we come to the conclusion again.

And also, after the end of this year, there are even more awesome things.

But, with regards to this awesome thing, it will start in September.

And, the start of that will be the launching of "Dai Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu 4" in September.

Speaking of that, I have to release a long story in September as well..... really dying..... (LOL)

So as to speak, the next time we meet, will be in Dragon Magazine's Denyuuden opening special, which will be sold at the same time as this volume.

And then, the next time will be Daiden 4 in Septemeber!

Please continue to support me!

Kagami Takaya

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **One-piece:** A one-piece, in Japanese, refers to a single piece dress.

2. ↑ **Claugh's Deaf Ears:** I kind of "un-translated" this sentence back to its original form. Reason is to match the dialogue that follows in page 67. What Claugh is saying here is that, "I'll hear you out but I'm not listening", (聞き流してやるぞ) → "I shall let your words fall on my deaf ears", he's implying that Ryner can say whatever he wants, but it's pointless, which was my original translation, but that didn't fit the next part of the dialogue.

3. ↑ **Nelpha vs Runa Discrepancy:** In Denyuuden, it was the Runa military that had captured Arua. This is obviously a mistake, and I'm sure Kagami is aware of the mistake since Denyuuden anime aired after he has written this. However, I do not know of any new edition where this is fixed. So I'm translating it as what was written in the novel rather than fixing it on my own accord, because there will be some linked mentions later. But even so, the impact of this discrepancy seems only limited to this volume and is not too big a deal, and does not affect the main plot in any major way.

4. ↑ **Nonsense:** Yes, it's pure nonsense. Don't worry if you don't get it, because half the time, I don't know what he's writing in his nonsensical afterwords.

5. ↑ **Name:** A name is a draft of a manga chapter shown to the editor before the artist works on the manuscript.